

**THE EXPERIENCES OF ADULT STUDENTS
WITH DYSLEXIA ENROLLED ON “ACCESS TO
HIGHER EDUCATION” PROGRAMMES**

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Abstract

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This study investigates the experiences of dyslexic students enrolled on the "Access to Higher Education" programme at five of the colleges of further education linked to De Montfort University. To supplement the main focus of the research the Learning Support tutors' experiences of helping this group of students were also investigated.

A mixture of qualitative data collection methods, such as interviewing and questionnaires were used at various stages of the research to explore both student and staff experiences.

By undertaking a process of critical reflection (Harvey, 1990) on both sets of experience, the research intended to:

- ❑ discover whether dyslexic students have been or continue to be excluded from benefiting from the *access* into higher education opportunities;
- ❑ uncover what these barriers are and how they operate;
- ❑ suggest ways to obtain maximum benefit from *access* opportunities into Higher Education for dyslexic students.

This study discovered that there were a range of factors within the educational environment and wider society which influence whether or not dyslexic students on *access* programmes benefit fully from this experience.

Abstract	ii
Contents	iii
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
Appendices	x
Abbreviations	xi
Glossary of Terms	xii
Acknowledgments	xiii

List of Contents

VOLUME ONE

Chapter 1: Introduction

1:1 A personal history	1
1:2 Origins of the research	2
1:3 Outline of study	4

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2:1 Critical Social Research as an approach to undertaking disability research	6
2:1:1 Critical Social Research and the Social Model of Disability	6
2:1:2 Critical Ethnography and Ethnography	10
2:1:3 Power	13
2:1:4 Social divisions	14
2:1:5 Reflexivity	15
2:2 Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory	17
2:3 Grounded Theory and the Social Model of Disability	28
2:4 Models of disability	30
2:4:1 Social Model of Disability	30
2:4:2 Social Model of Impairment	32
2:4:3 Social Model of Disability and dyslexia	34
2:4:4 Social Model of Disability and further education	36
2:4:5 Medical Model of Disability	37
2:4:6 Individual Model of Disability	38

Chapter 3: Disabled students within education

3:1 Compulsory education and disability	40
3:2 Further education and disability	51

3:2:1 Development of the <i>access</i> programme	56
3:2:2 Mature students' experience of <i>access</i>	62
3:2:3 Disabled adults' experience of education	70
3:3 Higher education and disability	81
3:4 Discussion	90

Chapter 4: Methodology and research tools

4:1 The Role of Theory	95
4:1:1 Grounded Theory and Substantive Theory	96
4:1:2 Grounded Theory and Formal Theory	96
4:1:3 Grounded Theory and Cumulative Theory	98
4:1:4 Grounded Theory and the wider social world	99
4:2 Coding of data	100
4:3 Computer assisted analysis of the data	104
4:4 Design of the research	106
4:5 Research tools	112
4:5:1 Methods of interviewing	112
4:5:2 Questionnaires	116
4:5:3 Validity and Reliability	117
4:5:3:1 Validity & Reliability and Critical Social Research	118
4:5:3:2 Validity & Reliability and Grounded Theory	127
4:5:3:3 Validity & Reliability and Transcription	128
4:5:4 Triangulation	130
4:5:5 Sampling	132

VOLUME TWO

Chapter 5: Experiences of education before *access*

5:1 Dyslexia whilst at school and college	138
5:1:1 Personal discovery of dyslexia	138
5:1:2 Knowledge of dyslexia displayed by teachers and lecturers	139
5:2 Parental attitudes towards their child's education whilst at school and college	144
5:2:1 Parental encouragement to gain an education	144
5:2:2 Parents had problems in accepting their difficulties	146
5:3 Student relationships whilst at school	147
5:4 Support whilst at school and college	149
5:5 Discussion	156

Chapter 6: Experiences of starting access programmes

6:1 Discovery of <i>access</i>	163
6:2 Nervousness about starting <i>access</i>	165
6:3 Family attitudes to <i>access</i>	168
6:3:1 Parents are supportive	168
6:3:2 Negative family reactions	170
6:4 Reasons for undertaking <i>access</i>	172
6:4:1 <i>Access</i> suited their needs	172
6:4:2 <i>Access</i> was a way to better themselves	174
6:4:3 <i>Access</i> was appealing	175
6:4:4 Locality of college helped in the discovery of <i>access</i>	178
6:5 Discussion	181

Chapter 7: Experiences of coping financially whilst on *access*

7:1 Survived on state benefits whilst on <i>access</i>	185
7:1:1 Little support from the Job Centre	187
7:2 Financial support from their parents and partner	190
7:2:1 Mother and father provided financial support	190
7:2:2 Partner provided financial support	192
7:3 Worked whilst on <i>access</i>	194
7:3:1 Worked to support themselves whilst on <i>access</i>	194
7:3:2 Could not work whilst on <i>access</i>	196
7:4 Additional funding for <i>access</i>	198
7:4:1 Applied to local authority for additional grants	198
7:4:2 Applied to local charities for funding	200
7:5 Discussion	201

Chapter 8: Experiences of Dyslexia whilst on *access*

8:1 Experiences of the dyslexia assessment	206
8:1:1 Discovered dyslexia through different methods of assessment	206
8:1:2 Mixed feelings about the assessment	210
8:2 Family reactions to dyslexia	212
8:3 Reaction of <i>access</i> staff to the respondent's dyslexia	215
8:4 Coming to terms with dyslexia	220
8:4:1 Unsure about whether they wanted to be dyslexic	220
8:4:2 Lack of understanding about dyslexia	225
8:5 Discussion	226

Chapter 9: Experiences of student relationships

9:1 Experiences of studying with fellow students	236
9:1:1 Experiences of studying with mature students	236
9:1:2 Experiences of studying with non-mature students	240
9:2 Experiences of relationships with other disabled students	242
9:2:1 Meeting other dyslexic students whilst on <i>access</i>	242
9:2:2 Awareness of other disabled students whilst at college	245
9:3 Experiences of dyslexia and fellow students	247
9:3:1 Has not told other dyslexics that they are dyslexic	247
9:3:2 Open about his dyslexia with fellow students	249
9:3:3 Reaction of fellow students to their dyslexia	254
9:4 Experiences of meeting new people through <i>access</i>	257
9:5 Discussion	261

Chapter 10: Experiences of support whilst on *access*

10:1 Experiences of support equipment	266
10:2 Experiences of academic support from family, partner and friends	273
10:2:1 Family were supportive	273
10:2:2 Friends where supportive	274
10:2:3 Partner was supportive	276
10:3 Experiences of support sessions	278
10:3:1 Support tutor provided English skills	278
10:3:2 Felt the support sessions was good	282
10:4 Experiences of relationships with support tutor	289
10:5 Discussion	293

Chapter 11: Experiences of the academic elements of *access*

11:1 Experiences of the work and study Environment	299
11:1:1 Studying within the library	299
11:1:2 Studying within the support centre	300
11:2 Experiences of the classroom environment	303
11:2:1 Enjoyed the classroom	303
11:2:2 Has difficulty within the classroom	307
11:3 Experiences of examinations	309
11:4 Experiences of writing essays	312
11:4:1 Took time to get used to writing essays	312
11:4:2 Important to be able to re-submit essays	316
11:5 Experiences of <i>access</i> subjects	318
11:5:1 Some <i>access</i> subjects were better than others	318

11:5:2 Helpful to have some knowledge of subjects before <i>access</i> started	324
11:6 Discussion	326

Chapter 12: Learning support questionnaire

12:1 Learning support questionnaire	332
12:2 Learning support provision at college A	333
12:3 Learning support provision at college B	335
12:4 Learning support provision at college C	336
12:5 Learning support provision at college D	338
12:6 Learning support provision at college E	340
12:7 Discussion	341

VOLUME 3

Chapter 13: Discussion

13:1 Contribution to existing knowledge	345
13:2 Evaluation of the theoretical framework and methodology	360

Chapter 14: Conclusions

14:1 Conclusions	369
14:2 Theoretical framework and methodology	374
14:3 Recommendations	375
14:4 Future work	383

Appendices	385
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Bibliography	450
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List of Tables

Table 2:1 Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory	22
Table 3:1 Children's and mothers' perceptions of the best and worst teachers they had encountered	44
Table 12:1 Breakdown of the staff responses to the Learning Support questionnaire	332

List of Figures

4:1 The context for the student experience of <i>access</i>	99
4:2 Displaying the various steps of how the data was categorised along the principles of Grounded Theory	103
4:3 How information technology was used to assist Grounded Theory Analysis	105
4:4 A model detailing the various stages of disabled people and the <i>access</i> opportunities into higher education	107
4:5 A model detailing the way in which the research was undertaken	111

List of Appendices

1(a): Stage 1 of the research: semi-structured staff interview schedule	386
1(b): Stage 1 of the research: semi-structured student interview schedule	387
2(a): Stage 2 of the research: un-structured student interview schedule	388
2(b): Stage 2 of the research: experiences of education before <i>access</i>	389
2(c): Stage 2 of the research: experiences of starting <i>access</i>	392
2(d): Stage 2 of the research: experiences of being dyslexic whilst on <i>access</i>	394
2(e): Stage 2 of the research: experiences of support whilst on <i>access</i>	397
2(f): Stage 2 of the research: experiences of student relationships whilst on <i>access</i>	400
2(g): Stage 2 of the research: experiences of coping financially whilst on <i>access</i>	403
2(h): Stage 2 of the research: experiences of academic elements of <i>access</i>	405
2(i): Stage 2 of the research: learning Support Tutor's experience of supporting dyslexic students on <i>access</i>	411
2(j): Stage 2 of the research: learning Support Questionnaire, College A	412
2(k): Stage 2 of the research: learning Support Questionnaire, College B	420
2(l): Stage 2 of the research: learning Support Questionnaire, College C	429
2(m): Stage 2 of the research: learning Support Questionnaire, College D	439
2(n): Stage 2 of the research: learning Support Questionnaire, College E	446

Abbreviations

ADO Adult Dyslexia Organisation
AVAs Authorised Validating Agencies
BDA British Dyslexia Association
DAST Dyslexia Adult Screening Test
DEE Disability Equality in Education
DES Department of Education and Science
DfEE Department for Education and Employment
DRTF Disability Rights Task Force
DSA Disabled Students' Allowance
NDT National Disability Co-ordination and Development Team
FEFC Further Education Funding Council
FEU Further Education Unit
HEFCE Higher Education Funding Council for England
LCIL Leicestershire Centre for Integrated Living
LEAs Local Educational Authority(ies)
NWDP National Working Party on Dyslexia
SEN Special Educational Needs
QAA Quality Assurance Agency
UPIAS Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation

Glossary of Terms

Disabled students = students with specific learning difficulties and or disabilities

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an introduction to the research by mapping out the reasoning for this study.

It aims to detail my initial interest in disability and the origins behind this research project. In providing such information, it will show that this study is grounded in the researcher's personal experience of the educational system and the wish to enhance the opportunities for disabled people within education.

1:1 A personal history

My initial interest in disability, in particular dyslexia, stems from personal experience. Prior to the recognition of my dyslexia late in my secondary education I experienced difficulties with my education. The problems can be attributed mainly to teaching styles being too prescriptive and a lack of knowledge about dyslexia. The eventual recognition occurred by chance a teacher suggested that the difficulties I was experiencing might be a result of dyslexia. After being assessed, I then had a successful experience due to supportive staff who encouraged and allowed me to develop my own styles of learning, which in turn allowed me to develop the necessary skills and strategies to obtain a place in higher education.

On entering higher education I found that there was little support for, and awareness of, dyslexia. It was during my second and final years as an undergraduate at Leicester University that there was an improvement in the support available. During the second year this improvement was based around my receiving the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), of which I only became aware after my mother had a conversation with the Welfare Services at Leicester University. The DSA was an additional grant which allowed me to purchase

equipment, such as a computer, to help me with my studies. My tutors began to offer me support sessions about my dyslexia and my specific educational needs. Further support was provided during my final year via the Learning Support Service. The overall result of this support programme was that it allowed me to achieve greater academic success at an undergraduate, and later at a postgraduate, level.

It was during my first period of employment as the Junior Research Fellow for the *Disabled Students in Higher and Further Education Project* that my academic interest of disability in higher education took root. The research conducted for that project formed the origins of this study.

1:2 Origins of this research

The research for the Disabled Students in Higher and Further Education Project required me to examine the current provision and support available for disabled students enrolled on further and higher educational programmes. An element of this research required me to examine the provision for disabled students enrolled on franchised programmes at the colleges of further education which are affiliated to De Montfort University. Whilst conducting this piece of the research I developed an interest in the support available to disabled students within further education. The research showed that there was greater support available to further educational students than to their counterparts in higher education. This was because the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC, 1996) had:

...introduced a funding methodology designed to reflect the costs of the additional support needed by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. (p.1).

It is through this mechanism that colleges are able to apply to the Further Education Funding Council for funds to develop a support provision. In contrast,

higher educational establishments have mainly relied on special initiatives (HEFCE M23/96) to increase access for disabled students. The difference in support between the sectors raised the question – would this variation encourage or discourage disabled students from entering further and higher education or making the transfer between these sectors?

While investigating the provision available to disabled students at the affiliated Colleges, my attention was drawn to the alternative entry routes into higher education. One prominent route was the *access* programme. This route interested me because it aimed to make higher education more accessible, particularly to under-represented groups such as women, people from ethnic minority groups and people with disabilities (UCAS, 1996). *Access* is a programme which aims specifically to improve the life opportunities of individuals by creating an opportunity for them to obtain a qualification. However, disability theories, especially those using the social model of disability, suggest that disability is created by society's failure to take into account the needs of disabled people (Oliver, 1996). These conflicting opinions and theories, as well as my own personal interest in dyslexia, led to the question – “Do the experiences of dyslexic students enrolled on *access* programmes suggest that the *access* route provides this group with a second chance to achieve success?” which forms the basis of this research.

The originality of this study is that it is the first published investigation of the experiences of dyslexic students enrolled on *access* programmes at colleges of further education. Previous research has focused on increasing access for disabled students from franchised programmes into a specific university (Morton and Aldridge, 1996). There has also been research which has specifically investigated the student experience, but that has mainly focussed on other non-traditional groups such as people from ethnic minorities (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 1999) which *access* programmes were designed to attract.

1:3 Outline of study

Having presented my personal interest in disability and the background behind the study, it is now necessary to map out the aims of this study.

The research was primarily an investigation of the experiences of dyslexic students on *access* programmes. It was supplemented by an investigation of the experiences of Learning Support staff who came into contact with such students. The investigation of these experiences was undertaken during one academic year, on a monthly basis, September to June 1997-98. The further education colleges selected were institutions spread throughout the Midlands and had links with De Montfort University.

A Critical Social Research paradigm (Harvey, 1990) was adopted to explore the student and staff experience of *access*. More specifically, a Critical Ethnographic method (Thomas, 1993; Carspecken, 1996) was adopted for this study. The Social Model of Disability (Oliver, 1990) is the theoretical framework adopted for this study. The Social Model of Disability fits into a Critical Social Research paradigm because it is able to highlight the barriers that disabled people face within society. To guide the analysis, the principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) were drawn upon. The methodology and theoretical framework fit together because they share the same commitment, which is to challenge the oppression groups, such as disabled people, face within society, by helping to change it for the better.

Qualitative methods of data collection were used to explore the student and staff experience. The student experience was investigated initially through unstructured then later semi-structured interviews. The Learning Support Tutor experience was investigated through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires.

The researcher had the following aims, which were to:

- ❑ investigate the experiences of dyslexic students enrolled on *access* programmes;
- ❑ determine if such opportunities do encourage dyslexic people to enter Higher Education;
- ❑ show whether this group is marginalised within the educational environment;
- ❑ increase the understanding and awareness of the needs of students with dyslexia within the *access* environment by highlighting the barriers they face through publication of the results.

By meeting these aims, through a Critical Social Research paradigm, it is hoped this study will provide a fresh insight into the *access* environment.

Chapter 2

Theoretical framework

This chapter maps out the theoretical framework adopted for this study.

2:1 Critical Social Research as an approach to undertaking disability research

Critical Social Research was adopted because it is recognised by the disability movement as an appropriate approach for disability research (Oliver, 1992). This is because there is dissatisfaction within the disability movement about scientific studies such as the Cheshire Home research (Miller and Gwynne, 1972). This is because traditional research has been recognised as maintaining, instead of challenging, the oppression disabled people face within society. The aim behind Critical Social Research is to move away from denying to promoting the interests of 'oppressed' groups (Barnes et al, 1999) such as people with disabilities. As the researcher is committed to producing research that would contribute to challenging the oppression faced by disabled people, therefore improving the position of this group, it was decided to adopt a Critical Social Research approach.

2:1:1 Critical Social Research and the Social Model of Disability

A Critical Social Research approach (Harvey, 1990) was adopted to provide a framework to locate both student and staff experiences of *access*. Carspecken (1996) summarises this approach.

Criticalists find contemporary society to be unfair, unequal, and subtly and overtly oppressive for many people. We do not like it, and we want to change it. (p.7).

Critical Social Research is an action-based approach that aims to reveal the barriers that oppress specific groups within society by not taking the:

...apparent social structure, social processes, or accepted history for granted. It tries to dig beneath the surface of appearances. It asks how social systems really work, how ideology or history conceals the processes which oppress and control people. (Harvey, 1990, p.6).

This approach aims to provide an insight into the social group being investigated. A Critical Social Research approach to this study would aim to establish the position of disabled students within the Further Educational environment whilst taking into consideration existing attempts to improve access to Further and Higher Education.

The collection of knowledge is viewed as a key part of a Critical Social Research approach. It adopts the:

...idea that knowledge is structured by existing social relations. The aim of a critical methodology is to provide knowledge, which engages the prevailing social structures. These social structures are seen by critical researchers, in one way or another, as oppressive social structures. (Harvey, 1990, p.2).

Current knowledge, in this case of dyslexia, is based on existing relations between the phenomena under investigation, and the structures that form the social site under investigation, in this case the Further Educational environment. Therefore, existing knowledge about the position of people with dyslexia within the educational environment would be based on current attitudes and opportunities available to this group. For the purpose of this study, it is therefore important to have existing knowledge of the attempts to improve access into Further Education, as highlighted through the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996). It is necessary to be aware of the financial difficulties mature students face when re-entering this educational environment, as this is potentially a confounding factor.

Critical Social Research uses the knowledge that it has collected about the group under investigation to question the:

...nature of prevailing knowledge and directs attention to the processes and institutions which legitimate knowledge. (Harvey, 1990, p.6).

Critical Social Research is therefore using the researcher's knowledge to question the validity of existing knowledge about the environment under investigation. This would involve taking into consideration the developments at a general level within Further Education, and more specifically on *access* programmes, to help disabled students as a whole. It would ask - does the *access* route into Higher Education encourage people with dyslexia to return to education? In considering this question, Critical Social Research looks to explore how the processes and structures, which support existing knowledge, help to maintain the oppressive structures faced by the group under investigation, such as dyslexic students. Critical Social Research is looking to establish why or how the structures under investigation are causing oppression within the environment under investigation. This research is using the new knowledge it gains, alongside political commitment to initiate change within society, in order to improve the position of the group it is investigating.

Whilst recognising the important role of knowledge within Critical Social Research in providing a critique of a society, it is necessary to recognise that this approach views knowledge as a dynamic process not a static entity (Harvey, 1990). This means that knowledge about the social world is constantly changing, it is an evolving process. For example, knowledge about the position of disabled students within Further and Higher education could have changed after the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). Bearing in mind the evolving nature of knowledge, it is necessary to recognise that:

...what may be a radical critique at one moment may in a later context, appear to be superficial. (Harvey, 1990, p.6).

This means that this specific investigation of the *access* environment would inevitably appear dated since it was based on the researcher's current knowledge. It is therefore necessary when undertaking Critical Social Research to recognise that one undertakes it within a social milieu. For the purpose of this study it was necessary to locate this investigation of the dyslexic student experience within the context of attempts to improve access to the educational environment.

The value of using knowledge within a Critical Social Research approach is that it is:

...a process of moving towards an understanding of the world and of the knowledge which structures our perceptions of that world. (Harvey, 1990, p.3-4).

It can reveal how and why we gain knowledge and how it may affect specific groups within society.

As the aim of critical social research is to reveal oppression, it makes it a suitable approach within which to locate the experiences of disabled people. This is achieved through Critical Social Research helping to translate the Social Model of Disability into practice, by helping to identify the obstacles faced by disabled people within society. This research approach aims to promote citizenship rights through the promotion of equal opportunities and inclusion. In this study Critical Social Research was used to reveal and highlight the barriers dyslexic students face within the *access* environment, in order to initiate change.

2:1:2 Critical Ethnography and Ethnography

A Critical Ethnographic method (Harvey, 1990; Thomas 1993; Carspecken, 1996) was used to explore the student and staff experiences. It is important to show why Critical Ethnography instead of conventional Ethnography was selected for the purpose of this study.

Before showing why Critical Ethnography, instead of Ethnography, was adopted, it is necessary to provide some historical background to both of these methods. The origins of Ethnography are located within the classical tradition of anthropology which emerged during the colonial period of the British Empire (Fielding, 1995). Ethnography was then a method used to describe the way of life of the indigenous people whom the Western European colonial powers ruled. The value of the Ethnographic method was in providing valuable information about the indigenous populations. Later Ethnography established itself as a method to explore obscure niches of social life. The emergence of the Chicago School helped to further develop Ethnography into the method it is today (Fielding, 1995). Instead of being a method to observe unknown cultures Ethnography moved into studying specific sections of the observer's culture. The Ethnographers influenced by the Chicago school placed an emphasis on:

...seeing things from the perspective of those studied before stepping back to make a more detached assessment. (Fielding, 1995, p.156).

The change of focus may be attributed to decolonisation, as well as the Chicago School sociologists' interest in studying oppressed groups within Western society.

The key work which established Critical Ethnography as a method for conducting social research was Paul Willis's 'Learning to Labour' (1977). This study introduced critical qualitative research (Carspecken, 1996) into the field of social research. Today Critical Ethnography is a method mainly used in the field of

educational research (Apple, 1986; Carspecken, 1991). There are examples of this method also being used in health research (Porter, 1993) where it is interpreted as a Critical Realist Ethnographic technique.

The main aim of researchers who use Critical Ethnography is a commitment towards identifying and illustrating:

...the processes by which cultural repression occurs. They then step back and reflect on its possible sources and suggest ways to resist it. (Thomas, 1993:15).

Whereas, the aim of an Ethnographic method is:

...to produce detailed pictures of events or cultures – descriptions which stand in their own right without the need to worry about how representative the situation is or what the broader implications might be in terms of other events or cultures of the type, or of contributing to wider theories. (Denscombe, 1998, p.70-71).

Hence the similarity between Critical Ethnography and Ethnography is that they each aim to describe the social site under investigation. However, it is the intentions behind the research methods which differ. Critical Ethnography studies specific groups in order to free such groups from an oppressive Capitalist society (Hammersely, 1992), it looks to achieve change and improve the position of the group being explored. In contrast Ethnography, through drawing on its naturalistic origins, has developed into a method which allows the researcher(s) to construct a picture of the specific group under investigation within their own cultural setting. Thus the main difference between these two methods is that Critical Ethnography has a political and historical commitment behind its description of the social site under investigation, which Ethnography does not.

Why is Critical Ethnography instead of conventional Ethnography a more appropriate method to undertake disability research? Through undertaking a detailed examination of the social group under investigation, such as dyslexic

students, a Critical Ethnographic method aims to locate this group within existing structures and power relations in order to establish how this group is oppressed within the social environment under investigation. A Critical Ethnographic method aims to reveal oppression by exploring:

...where possible, the inconsistencies between action and words in terms of structural factors; to see to what extent group processes are externally mediated; to investigate how the subjects see group norms and practices constrained by external social factors; to see how prevailing ideologies are addressed; to analyse the extent to which subversive or resistant practices transcend prevailing ideological forms; and so on. (Harvey, 1990, p.13).

Conventional Ethnographers spend a:

...considerable time in the field among the people whose lives and culture are being studied. The ethnographer needs to share in the lives rather than observe from a position of detachment. Extended fieldwork allows for a journey of discovery in which the explanations for what is being witnessed emerge over a period of time. (Denscombe, 1998, p.68).

A researcher becomes immersed in the field of study, to understand the group that is being investigated, with the intention of providing a straightforward description of the group:

...the crucial factor, from this position, is the depth and detail of the description, the accuracy of what it portrays and the insights it offers to readers about the situation being studied. (Denscombe, 1998, p.70).

The value of Ethnographic research is the detailed picture it constructs of the events or cultures that a researcher is exploring. A researcher is therefore able to fully understand the position of the group under investigation. The subjective emphasis has resulted in Ethnography being developed into a value-based way of exploring the social world (Harvey, 1990).

2:1:3 Power

In comparing Critical Ethnography and Ethnography, it is necessary to explore how each deals with the issue of power relations. Critical Ethnography displays a direct commitment towards challenging the power relations which exist within a society, as a way to reveal the oppressive structural relations that exist within the environment under investigation (Harvey, 1990) such as *access* programmes. Critical Ethnography addresses the issue of power relations in an attempt to find out whether the group under investigation, such as dyslexic students, are really facing oppression within the educational environment. In achieving this goal, Critical Ethnography connects power relations with action, which results in this method interpreting:

All actions...[which]...'intervene' in the stream of events and therefore 'make a difference,' no matter how large or small. Moreover, all acts could have otherwise, in principle, and therefore they express the actor's power of determining one course of action over another. (Carspecken, 1996, p.128).

Critical Ethnography recognises that the actions of one group have the potential to affect another, by shaping the possible opportunities available to the other. For example, this method would view the lack of knowledge that teachers have of dyslexia as being oppressive, because they have the power to shape future educational and life opportunities available to this group. The lack of knowledge about dyslexia displayed by teachers could be explained by the hidden nature of this disability. Through highlighting how teachers are in a more powerful position than their dyslexic students, Critical Ethnography is attempting to improve the power relations between these two groups.

In contrast, Ethnography is a method that displays no direct commitment towards revealing the power relations within the environment under investigation. Instead it is a method where:

...there is special attention given to the way the people being studied see their world. (Denscombe, 1998, p.68).

Through constructing a picture of the world under investigation from the participants point of view, Ethnography does not display the same direct commitment which Critical Ethnography does towards revealing the power relations. However, in providing a picture, Ethnography does have the potential to reveal the power relations between groups that exist within the environment under investigation. It was therefore possible for students to talk about their experiences of relations with their teachers if they were asked to talk about their experiences of education.

2:1:4 Social Divisions

How do these methods tackle the issue of social divisions? Critical Ethnography recognises the ways in which society is divided. This particular method adopts the view that:

...the survival of any society requires repression of some acts, including predatory behaviour, or the imposition of social norms such as language. Not all constraints, however, are equally necessary or beneficial for social harmony and growth. Constraints that give some groups or individuals unfair advantage to the disadvantage of others, or social elements that automatically excludes some people from full participation in (and the benefits of) the resources commonly available to those more privileged (e.g. health care, education, or employment) are considered unnecessary. (Thomas, 1993, p.5).

Critical Ethnography adopts the view that whilst some repressive acts are not acceptable, such as robbery, it also recognises that some groups may be excluded

more than others because of the way in which society is structured. One example would be the exclusion of dyslexic instead of non-dyslexic people within the educational environment by means of the emphasis on communicating with the written word. This form of exclusion results in dyslexic people being less able to achieve the same educational success, which in turn may restrict the life opportunities available to this group. Hence people with dyslexia do not have the same opportunities as would be available to their non-dyslexic peers, which results in the latter being in a more powerful position within society than the former. Critical Ethnographers wish to challenge the oppressive social divisions that exist within society through their commitment towards invoking social consciousness and societal change (Thomas, 1993).

Ethnography adopts a different approach towards the issue of social divisions. Ethnography constructs a picture of the group under investigation through studying the culture solely for the purpose of describing it (Thomas, 1993). In developing this description Ethnography does not intend to reveal the social divisions that exist within the environment. However, with Ethnography wishing to construct a subjectively based picture of the environment, it may clearly be dependent on whether this group wishes to reveal such divides.

2:1:5 Reflexivity

A key characteristic of the ethnographic method, whether it is either conventional or Critical Ethnography is a requirement to address the issue of reflexivity. Thomas (1993) defines reflection as:

...the act of rigorously examining how this involvement affects our data gathering, analysis, and subsequent display of the data to an audience. (p.46).

Reflexivity, therefore, involves the researcher considering the impact they had on the study and how their influence has affected it from data collection through to

the presentation of the findings. Thomas (1993) states that a Critical Ethnographer has to ask two questions when addressing the issue of reflexivity.

The first is, what is the truth quotient of the study? Here, we examine how own values and ideology influence our work, whether we might inadvertently have excluded counterexamples that would subvert our analysis, and how our study might be different if we could redo it. The second question examines the social implications of our findings and how we present them. In this phase, we ask how our study challenges injustice and what the implications for action are. (p.47).

Reflexivity for Critical Ethnography involves the researcher considering how they have affected the research and the implications of what they have discovered for the group under investigation, as well as wider society.

Ethnography deals with reflexivity in a similar way, by asking the question.

How far can my description of the culture or event depict things from the point of view of those involved, when I can only use my own way of seeing things, my own conceptual tools, to make sense of what is happening? (Denscombe, 1998, p.73).

This process of reflection aids an Ethnographic researcher to construct a representative picture of the environment under investigation.

In comparing Critical Ethnography and Ethnography, it is now necessary to establish why the former method was used. For the purpose of this study, it is the direct commitment of Critical Ethnography to revealing oppression within society that makes it preferable to conventional Ethnography. Harvey (1990) provides an explanation for this.

Critical Ethnography, thus differs from conventional Ethnography because it locates specific practices in a wider social structure in an attempt to dig beneath surface appearances. It is indifferent to 'value

freedom' and does not consider it necessary for the researcher to be a neutral observer. (p.14).

As Thomas (1993) states:

Conventional ethnographers study culture for the purpose of describing it; critical ethnographers do so to change it. (p.4).

It is Critical Ethnography's commitment to achieving change which makes it a suitable tool for carrying out disability research.

2:2 Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory

Before establishing how Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory can work together to construct a detailed and complex picture of the *access* environment it is necessary to remind ourselves of the research approach and method of analysis used to explore the *access* environment.

Critical Social Research is an approach that has traditionally focussed on the criticism of the contemporary social order within society. This approach has been reflected in the activities of Marxists, social critics and other radical social scientists (Harvey, 1990). Critical Social Research is a flexible approach that can be used to investigate a range of areas within social life. It has been used to provide a critique of bureaucratisation, institutionalised power and the manipulation of mass society (Ross, 1901; Thomas, 1917; Mannheim, 1972).

The commitment of critical social research is to reveal the oppressive social structures that exist within society. Harvey (1990) states that the term structure can be interpreted in two ways within social research. The definition used for the purpose of this study is that structures are:

...a complex set of interrelated elements which are interdependent and which can only be adequately conceived of in terms of the complete structure. (Harvey, 1990, p. 25).

One example of such an element in this study is the financial support available to *access* students within the Further Educational environment.

Critical Social Research states that the oppressive social structures a group such as dyslexic people, face are created through political and economic power, based on ideology. This research approach searches for oppressive social structures by not taking objective social appearances for granted. It tries to dig beneath the social structures to find out what is going on within the environment under investigation. It locates the social phenomena under investigation within their specific historical context, which would involve locating the dyslexic student experience of *access* programmes in the context of the developments that were occurring within the Further Educational environment between 1996-1999.

Whilst aiming to reveal the position of dyslexic students within the *access* environment, Critical Social Research aims to improve the position of this group through:

...an analysis of social processes, delving beneath ostensive and dominant conceptual frames, in order to reveal the underlying practices, their historical specificity and structural manifestations. (Harvey, 1990, p.4).

Grounded Theory has a different background and commitment from critical social research. Grounded Theory emerged from the two distinctive philosophic and research backgrounds of Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser in their joint work 'Discovery of Grounded Theory' (1967). Strauss's contribution to Grounded Theory was to help it to develop into the current interpretative method and stems from symbolic interactionist works such as W.I. Thomas (1966) and Martin Bulmer (1969). The symbolic interactionist work of the Chicago school of Sociology influenced Grounded Theory through:

...(a) the need to get out into the field, if one wants to understand what is going on; (b) the importance of theory, grounded in reality, to the development of a discipline; (c) the nature of experience and undergoing as continually evolving; (d) the active role of person in shaping the worlds they live in; (e) an emphasis on change and process, and the variability and complexity of life; and (f) the interrelationships among conditions, meaning, and action." (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.24-25).

Glaser's influence on Grounded Theory was to shape it into a rigorous scientific method. This was through introducing:

...the need for a well thought out, explicitly formulated, and systematic set of procedures for both coding and testing hypotheses generated during the research process. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.25).

A further contribution of Glaser was for Grounded Theory to display an emphasis on empirical research, in conjunction with the development of theory. The intention behind developing Grounded Theory was to conduct research that would be of use for professional or lay audiences and has resulted in this method being used within the fields of education, social work and nursing (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Before establishing how to develop Substantive and Formal Theory using the principles of Grounded Theory, it is important to draw on the principles of Merton's (1967) middle range research to assist with the analysis. Middle-range research recognises that although a researcher has developed initial ideas about a research problem through empirical observations of some social phenomenon, a theoretical explanation is constructed to explain the phenomenon under investigation (Layder 1998). The next stage of the research is then to proceed:

...on the basis of finding more facts and information about the topic area or problem in question in order to 'test-out' the original hypothesis. The unearthing of evidence through empirical research

either confirms the initial theoretical ideas or disconfirms them leading to their reformulation or abandonment. (Layder, 1998, p.16).

Middle range research aims to develop a theory based on existing knowledge which would then be tested out during the research. This particular form of research can connect with Grounded Theory through recognising the knowledge that the researcher has and the impact on the research, which has otherwise been called theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Existing knowledge would be the recognition of attempts to improve access to education for dyslexic people, and the oppression disabled people face within society.

For the purpose of this study, the middle range theory developed before the study was 'that dyslexic people encounter oppression at various levels within the educational environment.' This preliminary hypothesis was tested out through investigating the various sub-categories, such as the respondents' experiences of education before *access*. Whilst this particular hypothesis was supported through the investigation of the students' experiences, it was clarified through the Cumulative Theory to emerge from the investigation of this particular category, which stated that 'the limited knowledge of dyslexia within society is a result of the hidden nature of this disability'. The value of drawing on the principles of Middle Range Theory is that it provides a starting point to generate the Substantive, Formal and Cumulative theories which are a key part of Grounded Theory analysis.

The theory or theories that a Grounded Theory method aims to produce are the Substantive Formal and Cumulative Theories. A Substantive Theory aims to depict:

...what the researcher has actually seen and/or heard. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.169).

The intention behind Substantive Theory is to provide explanations that fit the substantive area being explored. Formal Theory builds on Substantive Theory by locating the study within the wider world (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Cumulative Theory is the final stage within the Grounded Theory methodology that involves linking the various Substantive and Formal Theories together (Layder, 1982 and 1993). In this research the aim is to link the theories generated from the environment under investigation with other theories, to provide a context in which to understand the position of those under investigation, that is the position of dyslexic people within the educational environment and society as a whole.

In developing theory, whether it is a Substantive, a Formal or a Cumulative explanation of the environment under investigation, it is important to recognise the role of extant data (Layder, 1998) within this process. Extant data:

...ranges far and wide to include anything and everything that can be brought to bear in an evidential sense on the forms of knowledge and explanation that our social theories provide. (Layder, 1998, p.165).

Extant data includes books and literature ranging between academic areas, popular literature, as well as representations through the media such as photographs, films and theatre. This specific form of data is therefore based on:

...any aspect of social life that is capable of representation in a form which allows it to be offered or referred to as evidence of social trends, customs, habits, types of work or recreation, and so forth. (Layder, 1988, p.165).

The value of extant data is that it recognises the impact of the social world in helping a researcher to formulate Substantive, Formal and Cumulative Theories that aid our understanding of the environment under investigation, such as *access*. The significance of drawing on extant data for Grounded Theory analysis is that it

is recognises that, whatever explanation is generated, it is not just based on the specific site under investigation.

Having shown how Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory can co-operate and how they explore social life, it is now necessary to reveal the relationship between the research approach and method of analysis adopted for this study. To show how Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory can work together, it is important to establish the key characteristics of this research approach and method. Table 2:1 compares Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory.

Table 2:1 Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory

	Critical Social Research	Grounded Theory
Ontology: What is the form and nature of reality?	Historical realism – displays a reality which is shaped by political and economic power.	Critical realism – displays a picture created of the reality under investigation.
Epistemology: How do we know the world?	Views knowledge as critical.	A view of knowledge grounded on the perspective and views of the respondents.
Overall Methodology: How do we gain knowledge about the world?	Not restricted to any one methodology, but looks to locate any findings within a critical framework.	Systematic generation of data with the aim of building up of facts based on the respondent experiences.
Techniques of data collection: How is the data collected?	Qualitative and Quantative methods of data collection such as questionnaires, interviews and participant observation.	Qualitative and Quantative methods of data collection such as questionnaires, interviews and participant observation.
Techniques of analysis: How is the collected data analysed?	Dependent on the method selected to investigate the social site or analyse the data.	A set of procedures to develop a theory or theories about the phenomenon under investigation based on the substantive data.

Critical Social Research adopts a historically realistic view of reality. This method locates the phenomena under investigation, such as the dyslexic student's experience, within an historical context by exploring the social, political and economic factors that influence the phenomena under investigation. Annells (1996) states that Grounded Theory adopts a critical realistic interpretation of the world.

This particular interpretation is based on a Symbolic Interactionist interpretation of the world which aims to depict a faithful picture of the reality of the social site under investigation.

Whilst Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory adopt two different approaches towards describing the environment under investigation, they display similar intentions by providing an interpretation of what is actually going on at a societal level. Critical Social Research aims to reveal the context in which the phenomena under investigation interact and how they are influenced by the structures that exist within the social environment under investigation. Similarly, Grounded Theory aims to reveal how the individual(s) under investigation interact within their social site, therefore attempting to display a picture that is faithful to the everyday realities of a substantive area (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

When turning to the epistemological stance of Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory it is evident that they differ in their interpretation. Critical Social Research adopts the view that the knowledge we have of the world should be located within a critical framework. As Harvey (1990) state:

Critical social research involves an epistemological perspective in which the knowledge and critique are intertwined. (p.3).

Critical Social Research uses knowledge as a process of moving towards an understanding of how the world is structured and perceived. When turning to Grounded Theory it adopts a view of the world based on the respondents' experiences of the world through encouraging:

...the researcher to focus on the 'close-up' features of social interaction. (Layder, 1993, p.55).

The choice of Grounded Theory displays a commitment to represent a faithful picture of the *access* environment through exploring how dyslexic students interact within this particular context.

Critical Social Research views knowledge as an opportunity to inform our critical understanding of the environment under investigation, whereas, Grounded Theory views knowledge as a tool to describe the reality of the social context from the participants' perspective. It is, therefore, the political nature of knowledge that separates Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory. This is because the knowledge a Critical Social Researcher gains about the environment under investigation contributes to their intention to achieve social change, whereas knowledge within a Grounded Theory method is viewed as non-political, simply providing a value free insight into the environment under investigation.

The overall methodologies of Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory clearly differ in how knowledge about the social world is collected. Critical Social Research is an approach that is not restricted to any one method of knowledge collection about the social world. As Harvey (1990) states:

Critical social research encourages neither methodic monopoly, nor, more importantly, method-led research. (p.8).

Critical Social Research places an emphasis on locating knowledge within a critical framework.

When turning to Grounded Theory, it places an emphasis on thinking about and conceptualising data (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). It is noticeable that Grounded Theory places an emphasis on a systematic approach towards gaining knowledge about the social world. This is through:

...developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does

this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.158).

The rigorous commitment of Grounded Theory provides consistent interpretations of the reality under investigation through the generation of theory.

Critical Social Research differs from Grounded Theory because the former is a value-based approach, whereas the latter is a systematic method. However, Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory can come together because Critical Social Research is not restricted to any one method to undertake investigations into social life. It is possible that a range of methods, whether they are Critical Ethnography or Grounded Theory, can be used to analyse the data. Through deploying Grounded Theory in collecting and analysing data, then locating the findings within a critical framework, I intend to reveal the position of dyslexic students in the *access* environment.

Critical Social Research is not restricted to either qualitative or quantitative methods of data collection. As Harvey (1990) states.

Critical social research requires that empirical material is collected. It does not matter whether it is statistical material, anecdotes, directly observed behaviour, media content, interview responses, art works, or anything else. Whatever provides insights is suitable. (p.8).

Grounded Theory is also a method that can use either qualitative or quantitative techniques of data collection to explore social life. Strauss and Corbin (1990) provide examples of how qualitative and quantitative techniques of data collection can combine.

One might use qualitative data to illustrate or clarify quantitatively derived findings; or, one could quantify demographic findings. Or, use some form of quantitative data to partially validate one's qualitative analysis. (p.18-19).

Through using qualitative and quantitative techniques of data collection together Grounded Theory can provide a detailed and representative picture of the environment under investigation.

Grounded Theory analyses data through the process called coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that:

...coding represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data. (p.57).

It is through the process of coding that theories about the environment under investigation are developed. Categorisation is by the constant comparative method of analysis, which involves looking for similarities and differences between the data to help in the development of Substantive, Formal and Cumulative Theory.

The implication of Critical Social Research being a flexible approach is that a range of research methods can be used to undertake an investigation of a specific social site. It would therefore seem possible for Critical Ethnography and Grounded Theory to work together as research methods within a Critical Social Research approach. Both the methodologies aim to achieve the same goal, which is to produce a theory or theories to explain the social site under investigation in terms of interactions and meanings.

The interactions, which Grounded Theory aims to reveal, can connect with the meanings Critical Ethnography looks to explore to provide a detailed insight into the environment under investigation. Grounded Theory builds up a picture of the social site, which would involve exploring how the dyslexic participants interacted with other students and College staff within the *access* environment in substantive areas, such as the experience of education before *access*. Critical Ethnography would then explore the meaning behind the actions of the dyslexic students in

selected substantive areas, therefore, explaining the respondents' reasons for starting *access*. Through investigating the meaning behind the respondents' actions a Critical Ethnographic method is able to suggest whether dyslexic respondents are encountering oppression within the *access* environment and cast light on why this might be the case. Grounded Theory and Critical Ethnography working together provide an insight into the complexities of the *access* environment by revealing the experiences of the respondents.

However, one must recognise that there is a difference between Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory, in relation to the intention underlying the production of the theory or theories. For example, Critical Ethnography aims to provide an explanation about the position of disabled students within wider society, with the intention of improving the position of this group. However, Grounded Theory aims to explain specific small-scale substantive areas of the social site under investigation, such as dyslexic experiences of coping financially whilst on *access*, then placing this in context within the wider social world through developing a Formal Theory. There is no specific commitment towards change through the produced research findings.

It is at this stage, the generation of theory, where Grounded Theory and Critical Ethnography can work together. Grounded Theory can be used as a method to generate research findings, which are represented through Substantive and Formal Theory, then placing these explanations within a critical framework to explain the position of disabled students within the *access* environment and wider society. Indeed, Glaser (1992) allows for this when he envisioned Grounded Theory as a vehicle for change because:

...it gives a conceptual grasp by accounting for and interpreting substantive patterns of action which provide a sense of understanding and control, and an access for action and modicum changes. (p.14).

While Grounded Theory can act as a tool which can contribute towards social change (Keddy et al, 1996), there is a clear emphasis on the researcher to take the explanations generated a stage further by placing them within a critical framework. The placing of Grounded Theory findings within a Critical Social research approach could be perceived as another form of building Formal Theory with a critical edge. This is because it is providing an explanation for the oppression dyslexic people face within society, through highlighting the specific barriers this group encounter within their environment and a wider explanation for their difficulties.

A further outcome of combining a Grounded Theory method within a Critical Social Research approach is in its provision of a micro and macro insight into the environment under investigation. The value of this mixed research method approach is that it has the potential to identify the specific and general barriers that are causing the oppression which specific groups in society face and, therefore, helps a Critical Social Researcher to bring about change.

2:3 Grounded Theory and the Social Model of Disability

In establishing how Grounded Theory can operate within a Critical Social Research it is important to establish how this approach is compatible with the Social Model of Disability.

The Social Model of Disability interprets disability as a form of social oppression (Powell, 1998). Grounded Theory will specifically highlight the oppression disabled people experience within the *access* environment. The oppression will be revealed by providing an insight into how the individual(s) interact with others within the social environment under study. The value of using Grounded Theory for study is that it is able to reveal the complex nature of the *access* environment.

The oppression will be revealed through Grounded Theory providing practical examples of the barriers disabled people experience within the educational environment. Corbin (1986) reinforces this view when advocating the value of Grounded Theory for the nursing profession.

The advantage it offers the nursing environment is that it allows nurses to capture the complexity of problems and the richness of everyday life which makes up so much a part of their practice. (p.91).

The value of using Grounded Theory is that it is a method that will be able to highlight the complexity of the environment under study, which can help to contribute towards further refining and developing (Artinian, 1986) the Social Model of Disability, therefore strengthening it as an explanation of disability. The contribution that Grounded Theory can make is that it can help to make the Social Model of Disability more relevant to individual needs through revealing the ever-changing nature of the interactions of the participants within the selected environment. This helps to reveal a more complex and detailed insight into the oppression disabled people face within the educational environment. As Strauss (1978) states:

We are confronting a universe marked by tremendous fluidity; it won't and can't stand still. It is a universe where fragmentation, splintering, and disappearance are the mirror images of appearance, emergence, coalescence. This is a universe where nothing is strictly determined. (p.123).

Through contributing evidence for the Social Model of Disability, Grounded Theory has the potential to help disabled people strive for the same citizenship rights as their non-disabled peers. The research of Knox et al (2000) also reflects the recognised that Grounded Theory is a method that can improve the position of disabled people within society, through focussing on a collaborative or partnership approach, when undertaking disability research. Grounded Theory has the

potential to be a research method that can help to create greater inclusion within an ever-changing society.

2:4 Models of Disability

There are currently four models of disability which have been used to explain the position of disabled people within society. These are the Social, Medical and Individual Model of Disability as well as the Social Model of Impairment.

The Social Model of Disability states that disability is created through society's failure to take into account the needs of disabled people. The Social Model of Impairment is an attempt to recognise a disabled person's experience of their impairment(s). The Medical Model of Disability locates disability within a medical framework by focusing on the body. The Individual Model of Disability places an emphasis on rehabilitating a disabled person back into society.

The intention here is to explore these various models of disability, in the order provided above, and establish how they define disability.

2:4:1 Social Model of Disability

The origins of the Social Model of Disability can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s when disabled people such as Paul Hunt, who was one of the founders of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), began to challenge the control which quasi medical and Social Services professions exerted over disabled people. It was through the emergence of these types of disability organisations that the first reference to the Social Model of Disability appeared.

Through the work of Finkelstein (1980) and Oliver (1990) the Social Model of Disability has become an established interpretation of disability. This particular definition is a new interpretation, developed by disabled people to explain their

position in society. The Social Model of Disability is based on a rejection of the Medical Model and the Individual Model of Disability and moves the focus onto society being responsible for the cause of disability. Oliver (1996) states that it is society's failure to provide appropriate services and to adequately ensure that the needs of disabled people are taken into account in its social organisation, which results in disability being created. By moving the focus away from the individual to society, the Social Model of Disability is acknowledging that disabled people are capable of, and have a right to, control their own lives.

A close examination of the Social Model of Disability shows it is a holistic interpretation developed by disabled people to explain their position in society. It is an attempt to collectivise and politicise disabled people into a single unit by establishing an identity for disabled people. Campbell and Oliver (1996) express the value of this interpretation when they state that the Social Model of Disability:

...freed up disabled people's hearts and minds by offering an alternative conceptualisation of the problem. Liberated, the direction of disabled people's personal energies turned outwards to building a force for changing society. (p.20).

By uniting disabled people into a single unit the Social Model of Disability promotes the right of equality for this particular group. The value of this interpretation of disability is that it highlights the areas in society where disabled people experience discrimination. By flagging up these areas, the Social Model of Disability attempts to achieve for disabled people the same citizenship rights enjoyed by non-disabled people.

Since the Social Model of Disability has become an established interpretation, disabled people have started to question its relevance. The questioning of this interpretation is not surprising because as the disability movement becomes more an established part of society it is logical to expect criticism of existing

interpretations and even new models being proposed. These developments reflect attempts by disabled people to re-define their own identity within society. The Social Model of Disability has been criticised from within the disability movement because it does not sufficiently recognise the individual's experience of disability. This is particularly in reference to gender (Morris, 1991), minority ethnic status (Stuart, 1993; Begum, 1994) and impairment (Crow, 1992; French, 1993). Sections of the disability movement have led individuals such as Abberley (1987) to argue that the Social Model of Disability should include a Social Theory of Impairment. Critics of this move, such as Finkelstein (1996), have argued that the effect of considering personal experience and impairment would be to dilute the effectiveness of the Social Model of Disability.

2:4:2 Social Model of Impairment

Another interpretation of disability to explain the position of disabled people is the Social Model of Impairment (Crow, 1996). This interpretation of disability has emerged because disabled writers have felt the Social Model of Disability has ignored personal experiences of impairment. Morris (1991) highlights this criticism when she states:

...there is a tendency within the social model of disability to deny the experience of our own bodies, insisting that our physical differences and restrictions are entirely socially created. While environmental barriers and social attitudes are a crucial part of our experience of disability – and do indeed disable us – to suggest that this is all there is to it is to deny the personal experience of physical or intellectual restrictions, of illness, of the fear of dying. (p.10).

The aim of this model of disability is to shift the focus away from society to the body, therefore acknowledging the individual experience of impairment. The focus on the body suggests the recognition that even when social barriers are removed, some impairments will continue to exclude disabled people from specific activities. French (1993) echoes this view when she states:

I believe that some of the most profound problems experienced by people with certain impairments are difficult, if not impossible, to solve by social manipulation. Viewing a mobility problem as caused by the presence of steps rather than by the inability to walk is easy to comprehend ... However, various profound social problems that I encounter as a visually impaired person which impinge upon my life far more than indecipherable notices or the lack of bleeper crossings, are more difficult to regard as entirely socially produced or amenable to social action. (p.16).

The function of the Social Model of Impairment is to provide a framework for disabled people to locate their physical experience of disability, it is an attempt to win the broadest possible support for disabled people (Barnes et al, 1999).

However, there are criticisms of this model from within the disability community. Barnes et al (1999) suggest that the Social Model of Impairment blurs the distinction between impairment and disability, through placing an emphasis on the body rather than social barriers, which results in obscuring the source of disability and the most appropriate targets for political action (Finkelstein, 1996; Oliver, 1996c). The concern about the emphasis on the physical body is that this definition can be viewed as another interpretation of the Medical Model of Disability. Recognition of this view comes from Shakespeare (1992), when he states:

To mention biology, to admit pain, to confront our impairments, has been to risk the oppressors seizing on evidence that disability is really about physical limitation after all. (p.40).

The danger in acknowledging the physical pain of disability is that it moves the focus away from society towards the individual, where medical and Social Services professionals are able to exert control over disabled people, therefore returning to the "old days" where disabled people were marginalised within society.

2:4:3 Social Model of Disability and Dyslexia

It is now necessary to establish whether dyslexia fits the Social Model of Disability. Dyslexia has become a prominent issue within society because of the emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills as the key for success in modern life. The failure to have these skills in place has resulted in many dyslexics being unable to obtain the qualifications that they need to obtain desired employment, therefore not being able to reach their full potential. The emphasis on writing skills is apparent as far back as the 19th century, when Berlin (1887) introduced the term “dyslexia” into written language:

When searching for a definition of dyslexia, it is noticeable that there have been numerous attempts to define this disability. One definition was provided by the Dyslexia Institute (1989), which states that:

...specific learning difficulties can be defined as organising or learning deficiencies which restrict the students' competencies in information processing, in motor skills and working memory, so causing limitations in some or all of the skills of speech, reading, spelling, writing, essay writing, numeracy and behaviour.(p.1).

Support for dyslexia as a learning difficulty comes from organisations such as the International Dyslexia Association (ODS, 1994) and the British Dyslexia Association (BDA, 1995), who provide similar interpretations.

It is also noticeable that at times dyslexia is referred to as a specific learning difficulty. This development was reflected in the Tizard Report (DES, 1972), which stated that:

...since the term 'Dyslexia'...is used so very loosely...we think it would be better to adopt a more usefully descriptive term, specific reading difficulties, to describe the problems of the small group of children whose reading abilities are significantly below the standards which their abilities in other spheres would lead one to expect. (p.5).

Support for the use of the term “specific learning difficulties” also comes from the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), which provides this term as an explanation for dyslexia. Reid (1994) suggests the term “specific learning difficulties” has emerged because it is part of a trend to merge this label with dyslexia. Pumfrey and Reason (1991) also suggest that the two concepts are becoming closer in interpretation, which has resulted in both these terms being used interchangeably.

In providing some background information for dyslexia, it is necessary to see how this term fits with the models of disability such as the Medical Model and Social Model of Disability. Thomas and Watkins (1990) and Snowling (1987) suggest that dyslexia can be located within a Medical Model of Disability. The work of Hinshelwood (1917) echoes this claim. It states that dyslexia is a congenital defect, occurring in children with otherwise normal, undamaged brains, characterised by a disability in learning to read so great that it is manifestly due to a pathological condition and where attempts to teach the child by ordinary methods have completely failed. Further support for dyslexia definitions being located in the medical model comes from the work of Critchley (1970) which insisted that dyslexia was a medical responsibility; and Galaburda’s study (1993) which showed that dyslexic brains are different in relation to the pattern of cell organisation that occurs during the pre-natal period of cell migration.

It is now necessary to see how dyslexia fits with the Social Model of Disability. Reid (1994) and Snowling (1987) suggest that dyslexia can be located within the Social Model of Disability through the failure of the educational system to take into account the learning needs of dyslexics. Recognition of this view comes from Reid (1994) who suggested that there should be attempts to match the curriculum to the needs of the student, irrespective of the difficulties being displayed, which would help to overcome the failure dyslexics already encounter within the educational

system. The work of Dodds (1993) and Russell (1992) is also cited as one way to help dyslexic students to overcome the difficulties they face within the educational environment. Their emphasis is on adapting the delivery of the curriculum to suit the person, instead of focusing on the individual's deficits or difficulties. This would involve teaching the same curriculum, but delivering it through different methods, to meet individual needs. Disability is created through a dyslexic person being forced to fit into the educational system and achieve what is expected of them within this specific environment.

Dyslexia fits with the Social Model of Disability because of the emphasis within society on communicating through the written word, which is reflected within institutions such as schools and colleges, by placing an emphasis on gaining qualifications through written communication. Since one measure of success in society is what qualifications one has, it is possible that dyslexics are excluded because of the different way in which this group communicates. It is therefore likely that a dyslexic is placed at a disadvantage because they are less able to communicate in the same way as their non-disabled peers.

Legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) explicitly recognises dyslexia as a disability. By providing rights for disabled people, including dyslexics, there is acknowledgement that society and the way it is structured is currently inaccessible.

2:4:4 The Social Model of Disability and Further Education

The assumption in adopting the Social Model of Disability is that the further education environment disables the individual disabled student. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) acknowledged the potential of the further educational environment to disable the student when it established the Tomlinson Committee with the brief to examine:

...current provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to say whether the new legal requirements of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 were being satisfied and if they were not in any respects, how that could be remedied. (FEFC, 1996, p.1).

This report's main recommendation of the greater need for inclusive learning within further education places a responsibility on this sector to better meet the learning needs of this group. This recommendation implies that there are barriers in place which are preventing disabled students from achieving educational success and that there is a need to break them down to make this sector more accessible.

2:4:5 Medical Model of Disability

The Medical Model of Disability is one interpretation of disability that has dominated Western societies. The medical model (Crow, 1996) locates disability within a clinical framework by solely focusing on the individual's body. This model interprets disability as:

...a person's functional limitations (impairments)...(as)...the root cause of any disadvantages. (Crow, 1996, p.57).

By placing disability within a clinical framework disability is linked with illness and this places a responsibility on the medical profession to provide either a cure or treatment through appropriate medical services. Through providing medical support, doctors are helping to integrate disabled people back into an able-bodied society, so that they can live a normal life. Begum (1996) presents this view, when quoting a respondent from her research:

I'm not asking for cure...I'm asking for support in managing my situation. This might mean acknowledging it's tough, helping me access resources, and helping me plan health management and learn relevant skills. (p.171).

The Medical Model of Disability is therefore useful if it is used to support the medical needs of disabled people. However, the criticism from the disability movement is that it gives the medical profession considerable power over their lives. Begum (1996) quotes one of her respondents to display the extent of this control:

I find difficult the extent to which my doctor is given control over my life. In the last year she has had to confirm that I can travel abroad, need the adaptations in my house, can have alcoholic drinks and give a full medical for a second mortgage...I have to pay for these services. She did not design the system and would like it to be different, nevertheless it does affect our relationship. (p.164).

The medical services doctors provide which help disabled people to live within an able-bodied society often result in the medical profession controlling the social environment of this group. The problem here is that doctors may think that they know better than a disabled person on how they should live their life. It is this control that the medical profession have over disabled people that resulted in this model of disability being challenged.

2:4:6 The Individual Model of Disability

The Individual Model of Disability is a further interpretation that has dominated Western societies. Oliver (1993) provides an interpretation of this model when he states that:

...the individual model sees the problems that disabled people experience as being a direct consequence of their disability. The major task of the professional is therefore to adjust the individual to the particular disabling condition. (p.15).

There is a responsibility on health practitioners, psychologists and educationalists to rehabilitate a disabled person through helping them to get used to their disability. The Individual Model of Disability uses an individualistic approach

through pathologising a disabled person as a problem (Begum, 1996). The Individual Model of Disability which is favoured by Social Service professionals is separate from the Medical Model of Disability because it focuses on social intervention. In contrast, the Medical Model of Disability focuses on the physical body.

Before considering alternative disability definitions, it is important to consider why these models emerged. Lessing (1981) showed why, when she stated:

Our society creates an ideal model of the physically perfect person where people are unencumbered by weakness, loss or pain; it is toward this distortion of perfection that we strive and with which we all identify. Thus, denial of the existence of imperfections is an acceptable form of behaviour and attitude. (p.21).

The origins of the Medical Model and the Individual model of disability are based on Western fascination with the human body and the need to achieve physical perfection.

Chapter 3

Disabled students within education

This chapter aims to chart the position of disabled students within the educational environment by reviewing the current literature. Placing the dyslexic student experience in context within the educational environment helps the researcher to understand:

how social systems really work, how ideology or history conceals the processes which oppress and control people. (Harvey, 1990, p.6).

3:1 Compulsory education

Starting with compulsory education: dyslexic students encounter a mixed experience. Riddick (1996) highlighted three areas where dyslexic students have a positive and negative experience of school. One of the problem areas was perceived difficulties with work at school. Riddick (1995b, 1996) suggested that spelling and writing problems were the most frequent difficulties in respect of schoolwork, which highlighted the prominence that children give to writing and spelling difficulties.

One individual remembered the difficulty he faced with subjects that required a lot of reading:

Like copying off the board, I get frustrated cause it slows us (me) down. Like the teacher will be speeding ahead and my writing's slow. David 12 years (Riddick, 1996, p.123).

Some children talked about the dilemma of whether to go for speed or accuracy in their work:

If a teacher dictates work I can't write fast and neatly. Luke, 13 years (Riddick, 1996, p.123).

At a more general level the respondents also recalled the pressure to keep up and the constant humiliation of always finishing last, or getting the lowest mark in spelling tests.

I usually finish my work last. Graham, 11 years (Riddick, 1996, p.123).

Other children also talked about the frustration of being told to hurry up and be tidier with their work.

Just saying like, 'Hurry yourself up,' and things like that when I cannot go any faster. David, 12 years (Riddick, 1996, p.123).

The above examples suggest that dyslexia has a significant impact on an individual student's writing, spelling and speed of work. Riddick (1996) suggests that these examples show that dyslexia is a developmental disorder that manifests itself in different ways at different ages and stages in a child's development. It is also acknowledged that the longer-term difficulties an individual student can face, within areas like writing and spelling, should not be overlooked. Riddick (1996) also states that it is important that educational providers have an understanding of writing, spelling and speed of work from a dyslexic child's perspective.

Under estimating difficulties also emerged as an important part of the dyslexic student experience. Riddick (1996) found that some of the younger children tended to under estimate their difficulties or appeared reluctant to acknowledge them. This particular finding was supported by Mark, when he was asked about what difficulties he had with his work at school. He responded with the comment:

I don't really have any problems. (Riddick, 1996, p.124).

And when asked how much he wrote compared to other children he said.

I just write the same. (Riddick, 1996, p.125).

In contrast, all of the mothers who took part in the study felt their children wrote less than their non-dyslexic peers. Mosely (1989) found a similar picture with dyslexic children writing less than their non-dyslexic peers. Taking into consideration this difference of opinion, Riddick (1996) questioned if the respondents were genuinely unaware of the extent of their difficulties; or were they personally aware, but not willing to admit to them; or had they, consciously or unconsciously, minimised their difficulties to maintain their self-esteem?

The possible reactions are because the respondents displayed a different interpretation of their self-esteem. This response suggests that it is more likely the respondents have higher levels of self-esteem in some areas of the educational environment than in others: a link between level of self-esteem, the feedback that a child receives on their performance and the way that they perceive their difficulties. Some teachers gave examples of one strategy by providing as much positive feedback as possible and just picking up on a few basic errors. Pollock and Waller (1994) reinforced this approach when they agreed that pointing out arbitrary spelling and grammar corrections are of little use to the child who needs to be given structured, coherent feedback. Riddick (1996) considered how far children need to be aware of their difficulties in order to progress or to accept help? This raises questions about what type of support should be available to the individual, whether it is focusing on improving difficulties or making environmental changes. Whilst it is recognised that environmental changes such as extra time in exams, taping work and photocopied notes, are helpful, they can also create difficulty. Riddick (1996) recognises that many dyslexic children, as they grow older, try to cover or disguise their difficulties from their peers. It is acknowledged that:

...what might be acceptable to one child may be highly unacceptable to another child and much might depend on how obtrusive or unobtrusive the intervention is. (Riddick, 1996, p.128).

This mixed view was illustrated by one of the respondents when asked about her experience of extra-time:

Yes, that's helpful. I didn't think it...well, in some things it isn't, but then in others it's been really helpful. (Riddick, 1996, p.128).

It was then explained why she found extra time obtrusive.

I have to go and do it in the Sixth Form so everyone knows. It's awful really. They don't consider your feelings that much. They made us get up, we had to walk out of an exam and go into another room, and there was like a hundred people watching us. (Riddick, 1996,p.128).

The availability of support is a step in the right direction, as it helps to make the school environment more accessible. However, there is the concern displayed by dyslexic students about "standing out" as someone different to their peers, which is difficult for the individual to accept.

How children felt about their difficulties emerged as another part of the dyslexic student experience. The respondents, in dealing with their difficulties:

...described themselves as disappointed, frustrated, ashamed, fed up, sad, depressed, angry and embarrassed by their difficulties. (Riddick, 1996, p.129).

In highlighting how they felt, the respondents talked about the various strategies they used for dealing with dyslexia. Some of the strategies the respondents used ranged from writing less to getting classmates to help and avoiding hard to spell words. These strategies, highlighted by Riddick (1996) fit with existing research, such as Mosely (1989) who showed that both children and adults with spelling difficulties have a restricted written vocabulary because of this barrier.

Riddick (1996) further highlighted a difference in educational expectations of dyslexic students between primary and secondary school. Primary school teachers were generally optimistic about their ability to overcome and improve their difficulties. Whereas secondary school teachers were more negative in their attitudes and did not expect the children to show substantial improvements. The increased number of strategies named by secondary children may be a response to this shift in ethos (Riddick, 1996).

“Best” and “worst” teachers’ characteristics emerged as a part of the dyslexic student experience of school. Table 3:1 highlights children’s and mothers’ perceptions of the best and worst teachers.

Table 3:1 Children's and mother's perceptions of the best and worst teachers they had encountered

Best teachers			
Children's perceptions (n=18')		Mothers' perceptions (n=18')	
Encourages/praises 9		Encourages/praises 12	
Helpful/adapts work/explains 7		Knows strengths 8	
Understanding/doesn't show up 6		Positive/support 7	
Doesn't shout 2		Believes in child 7	
Sense of humour 2		Boosts self-esteem 7	
Knew child was dyslexic 1		Understands 7	
Treats as intelligent 1		dyslexia	
Worst teachers			
Children's perceptions		Mothers' perceptions	
Cross/impatient/shouting	7	Doesn't understand difficulties	6
Criticises or humiliates	6	Puts down or humiliates	5
Not helpful/negative	5	Negative attitude/no praise	5
Ignores/thinks useless	4	Low expectations/ignores	7 ²
Not understanding/		Lacks tolerance/ no allowances	3
Insensitive	4	Shouts at child	3
Blames you/ thinks you are			
Lazy	4		
Red lines through work	3	Red lines through work	4

¹ As 4 out of the 22 mother/child pairs said they had not encountered any best or worst teachers only the remaining 18 pairs are represented on this table.

Riddick (1996) highlighted some of their respondents' experiences. One respondent and his mother recalled how positive one teacher was:

She was wonderful, she encouraged him, praised him and rewarded him. She boosted his self-esteem and he progressed a lot with Mrs M. She enjoyed teaching him.

Mrs M. She knew I was intelligent. She used to encourage me and she used to help me with my work. (Riddick, 1996, p.133).

Children and mothers also mentioned the importance of not being shown up or humiliated by teachers:

Like she makes allowances for me and she doesn't show me up. She praises me and gives me gold stars. (Riddick, 1996, p.134).

Turning to the worst teachers, there was close agreement between dyslexic children and mothers. One respondent recalled his experience of primary school:

There was one in the primary school, I won't mention her name. She said I was useless at everything and I couldn't do anything. My mum was very angry. (Riddick, 1996, p.134).

Another respondent recalled little tolerance being displayed by another teacher:

His second teacher was a battle axe. There was red writing all over his books and no praise at all. (Riddick, 1996, p.134).

Moving onto secondary school both mothers and children felt their teachers criticised them, ignored them and had low expectations. One respondent's mother recalled her daughter had been put in the "bottom" set for everything.

She's had teachers who've yelled at her, crossed everything out, labelled her slow and had low expectations of her. (Riddick, 1996, p.135).

Another respondent's mother recalled that despite her child's IQ and motivation, her child put in the bottom set for most subjects.

At school they think he's great, but he's in the bottom set for everything. He's not being given any homework, he's probably not being stretched enough. Some of the teachers think that because they're in the bottom set that they don't matter, they ignore them and give them less attention. (Riddick, 1996, p.135).

The worst teachers were therefore thought to be negative in attitude, critical, humiliating, lacking in understanding and even ignoring dyslexic children. The findings about good and bad teachers are reflected in other research (Burns, 1982), which found a similar picture.

Riddick et al (1997) further explored the dyslexic student's experience of school by exploring what it is like to grow up with this disability. Riddick et al (1997) suggested that:

...the students in our sample could be said to have fairly negative perceptions of their school experience. Some of these perceptions are of punishment and humiliation owing to their teachers' perception of them as being lazy and failing to work hard enough to achieve their potential. (Riddick et al, 1997, p.160).

These negative experiences were mainly reflected by older students who took part in the research, who had attended school when dyslexia was not recognised within the educational environment. Younger students also reported a similar negative experience with schools not recognising dyslexia or willing to provide appropriate support. These negative encounters seem to be common in the existing literature (Osmond, 1993; Barga, 1996), reflecting the dyslexic educational experience.

Some research also found dyslexic students had a positive experience of school. Riddick et al (1997) characterised this positive experience as protective factors. One

of these factors was early identification, which one of the respondents recalled as contributing towards a positive experience of school.

No, not really, because I was the famous one. A famous dyslexic, because it was found out early on. So everyone cottoned on to it and recognised it. But not recognise as in sort of help you or teach you differently. They said, 'It's OK, we understand you're not thick.' (Riddick et al, 1997, p.147).

Early identification and recognition of the nature of their difficulties enabled these individuals to avoid the stigma of being perceived as not academically capable, therefore increasing the chances of having a positive experience of education as a whole.

Another protective factor to emerge was the quality of the support that some teachers were able to give. Riddick et al (1997) found some teachers were sensitive and receptive to the difficulties of the student and provided appropriate support.

The woman ... [at school] ... was very, very sympathetic and very helpful and she sort of helped my reading and my dad made me read every single night. I had to read two pages when he got home from work. (p.48).

Whilst this respondent found the support helpful, the students, on the whole, had encountered difficult and painful experiences of support. This view was characterised by the respondents' feeling that the support was inappropriate, such as learning to spell "baby words," or being placed in a group where:

...the rest of the morons did not want to work. (Riddick et al, 1997, p.161).

It is also important to remember that primary education for some of the respondents occurred when literacy problems were seldom recognised. Instead of recognising this disability, it is likely teachers may have viewed dyslexic students displaying a:

...slovenly attitude rather than an inability to spell and produce well-written, well organised work. (Riddick et al, 1997, p.161).

It is important to recognise that the negative experience will be given greater weight by the individual than a positive one, which will clearly influence educational experience.

A further protective factor to emerge as important to the dyslexic student experience was the quality of parental support. Some of the students in the sample recalled positive support provided by their parents:

Yes, they thought it should have been the teachers, but they had to take it on themselves. (Riddick et al, 1997, p.135).

They also recalled their parents' struggle with the school to have the nature of their difficulties recognised.

They knew right from the start about spelling – right from the age of primary school at about 6. They talked to the teachers all the time and they said 'it'll come.' So they weren't bothered at all. (Riddick et al, 1997, p.131).

The research also revealed examples of students receiving little help from their parents to assist them with their educational experience:

...my father was very hostile to the whole thing. He was very negative, and he couldn't understand, and was very let down, and there was no support from my father. (Riddick et al, 1997, p.66).

Parents sometimes believed that the teachers were right and their judgements should not be questioned.

They were told when I was 6 that I must be a great disappointment to them by the school I was at, that I would never achieve great things, [that] I was thick and stupid. My parents never bothered and

they accepted that, they weren't educated people. (Riddick et al, 1997, p.79).

The impact of this encounter is that the individual student will believe that they are not academically capable and be isolated from both their parents and their parents.

The effect of the school experience on the dyslexic student was mixed. Riddick et al (1997) suggest that dyslexia has a continuing influence through wanting to show them (teachers) and to prove themselves academically capable. Alternatively, other students focus on the anxiety with which the experience has left them and the effects upon their self image, whilst others are angry and frustrated or lacking in confidence. It seems more down to chance – happening to select the right school and teachers - which would result in dyslexics having a positive experience of school.

Exploring the dyslexic student experience of compulsory education has highlighted within the literature it is evident that this group will have a mixed experience of this particular sector. Whether the respondent will have either a positive or negative experience is dependent on coming into contact with a school and staff who have knowledge of dyslexia and are able to provide appropriate support, plus appropriate some parental factors.

Taking this variation into consideration, it is necessary to explore why dyslexic students and, possibly others, encountered this variety of experiences during compulsory education. One explanation for this variation in experience is that is dependent on the individual student coming into contact with teachers who have knowledge of this particular disability. This point is echoed through the research of Riddick (1996) which highlighted good and bad teachers within compulsory education, as part of the student experience. Recognition of this inconsistency is

reflected in the work of Pumfrey and Reason (1991), Peer (1994) and Edwards (1994), who recommended teacher training on dyslexia. This would increase the chance of this disability being recognised and place teachers in a better position to provide appropriate support. The impact on the dyslexic student experience is that increased knowledge of dyslexia improves the chance of this group achieving academic success, which will contribute towards the individual student feeling more included, therefore, less different from their peers.

In recognising that teachers' limited knowledge of dyslexia is contributing towards this group having a mixed experience of compulsory education, it is important to consider whether there are any further factors in place that are contributing towards this variation.

The introduction of statementing, through the 1981 Education Act, is one factor which influences a disabled student's experience, whether or not they are dyslexic. In theory the introduction of statementing helps to make the compulsory sector more accessible, because it aims to develop a plan that intends to meet individual need, therefore, enabling the individual to achieve academic success. However, the problems highlighted with statementing by Leicester (1999), who found the statementing process was taking too long. The Audit Commission (1992, 1992a and 1992b) discovered that Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) have attempted to avoid providing the funds for statemented children, which suggests that a disabled child may not receive the support they require to make the environment accessible. The financial cost of providing a statement and the support identified is that it has the potential to stop dyslexic students from receiving the support they need to achieve academic success, therefore, enforcing a feeling of exclusion within the educational environment and wider society.

The picture that emerges is that it is more likely to be a lottery whether or not a dyslexic student will have a positive experience of compulsory education. Some being fortunate enough to come into contact with teachers who have knowledge of this disability and are able to provide appropriate support, as well as being lucky enough to select an LEA and school that is able to meet the educational needs of a dyslexic student, possibly through the mechanism of their statement. Whereas, failure to come into contact with aware staff, school and LEA can result in dyslexic students not being able to achieve the academic success of which they are capable, life opportunities.

3:2 Further education and disability

Turning to further education: there have been attempts to open up this sector for disabled students. A significant contribution was the Further and Higher Education Act, 1992, which established the Further and Higher Educational Funding Councils the FEFC and the HEFCE. Section 4 of the Act placed a responsibility on the Council to have regard to the requirements of persons having learning difficulties. Before the Act came into force:

...provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varied significantly from college to college and from one Local Education Authority to another in size, quality, range, and in the commitment and effectiveness with which it was managed. (FEFC, 1996:1).

To establish whether the Council was meeting the Act's requirements, the Tomlinson Committee was formed. This Committee was asked to:

...examine current educational provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to say whether the new legal requirements of the Further and Higher Education Act, 1992 were being satisfied and, if they were not in any respects, how could it be remedied. (FEFC, 1996:1).

The main recommendation to come from this Report was the need for inclusive learning. The purpose of this key recommendation was to develop an environment of inclusion, which encourages disabled people to enter and have a successful experience of mainstream further education. Inclusive learning is helping to provide disabled people with the same educational opportunities available to their non-disabled peers.

Another attempt by the Funding Council to improve access to further education has been through its funding methodology. Since 1994-95 the Council's methodology has:

...contained an element to provide additional units for those students who require additional support for their learning. (FEFC, 99/05, p.3).

The aim of this retrospective additional funding is to provide institutions with the money they require to provide support for this group of students, with the aim of making their programmes of study more accessible. This funding would cover areas such as additional teaching, interpreting or personal care. To help the institutions access this additional funding:

...guidance is provided on how to build these additional costs into College budgets. The guidance emphasises the importance of planning, and encourages to draw on information derived from multi-agency collaboration, school links and careers information. (FEFC, 99/05, p.3).

The Funding Council is, therefore, providing institutions with the opportunity to obtain funds to help colleges to make their environment more accessible, increasing the chances of this group having a much-improved educational experience.

A further attempt to make the FE sector more accessible was through the Council defining good practice in supporting this group. This has been through its report

on the 'Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities' (1996). It defines a successful provision:

...where senior managers provide strong, effective leadership, are knowledgeable about the work committed to developing an 'inclusive' approach to education in which all students are perceived to be of equal value, and demand the same level of rigour as they do for any other area of provision. Responsibility for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is shared by the college as a whole and not allowed to rest solely with a specialist department. Often, where there is provision of high quality, it is supported by a policy which staff from all departments have developed. The policy is used to spell out the College's philosophy in relation to its provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to provide a framework for the development of the provision. Care is taken to ensure that the provision is co-ordinated across the College by: establishing clear roles and responsibilities; identifying 'named' people in each department or faculty to act as the contact person for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and providing sufficient time for the co-ordination of the provision. (p.13-14).

Good practice towards disabled students is, therefore, developing a provision which is embedded within all levels of the structure of the institution. A supplement to these attempts to make the sector more accessible is through the Funding Council using a team of inspectors to evaluate the quality of provision for this group.

The introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) has also helped this sector to become more accessible for disabled students. This is firstly through the Act requiring the Funding Council to produce an Annual Report to the Secretary of State on:

- ...a. the progress made during the year to which the report relates in the provision of further education for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and
- b. its plans for the future provision of further education for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. (FEFC, 99/05, p.3).

The significance of this approach is that it is keeping the government abreast of the moves towards making this sector more accessible for disabled people. Through this approach it will help the government to identify the need, whether to carry on with existing policies, or to change them. The second requirement of this piece of legislation is for the Funding Council to require further education colleges to publish annual Disability Statements. The Statement aims to provide information about the facilities each college has in place for disabled students.

The next major development within Further Education which touched on the issue of disability and Further Education was the Kennedy Report (FEFC, 1997). Its aim was to advise the Funding Council on how it could achieve one of its aims, which is:

...access to further education for people who do not participate in education and training, but who could benefit from it. (FEFC, 1997, p.iii).

The Kennedy Committee was, therefore, not directly considering the issue of disability and Further Education, but it was investigating ways in which it could make this sector more accessible to groups that would not normally participate. One of the key findings to emerge was that market principles would not widen participation (FEFC, 1997). The value of these reports is that they moved the focus away from the traditional opportunities available to disabled people within this sector such as:

...‘social training,’ general life skills,’ and specialist disability skills such as lip reading. (Barnes et al, 1999, p.108).

to more mainstream educational opportunities such as the vocationally based qualifications available to non-disabled students.

In establishing the wider developments to improve access to further education for disabled people, it is important to consider whether these changes would encourage dyslexic students to progress on to higher education. The significance of these wider developments is that, in theory, they help to contribute towards creating an inclusive further educational environment, through recognising the additional support needs of dyslexic people. The implication of these improvements is that they have the potential to encourage a dyslexic student to progress into Higher Education, but the key question to consider is how dyslexic people would become aware of the moves towards improving access within further education?

The main obstacle that Further Educational providers needed to overcome was to show to dyslexic people that the negative experiences that they encountered previously within their education would not be repeated. There are two main ways in which dyslexic people can find out about developments within this sector. The first route is through institutions marketing the support available, through college or programme literature. The value of this route is that it will help individuals who are already aware of their dyslexia to seek immediate support with their studies, which increases the chance of achieving academic success sooner rather than later. The second route in which an individual dyslexic student can discover the developments within further education is more through chance. This would occur through dyslexic students coming into contact with either previous students or staff who have knowledge about the developments within further education to help disabled students. The value of this contact is that it could also lead to a student discovering that they are dyslexic, if they were previously unaware.

The picture that emerges is that the attempts to improve access for disabled people have the potential to increase awareness and raise the understanding of the needs of this group within the further educational environment. This is through

providing dyslexic students with the support to enable them to achieve academic success. The implication of these developments is that if a dyslexic student has a successful experience of further education, it will encourage them to progress onto university, based on the belief that they will encounter similar positive experiences. However, the lack of promotion of these opportunities suggests that some dyslexic people may miss out on the opportunities that furthering one's educational career can bring, such as qualifications, which lead to improved career opportunities. This is because they believe that the similar negative experiences, which they encountered previously within their education, would be repeated.

3:2:1 Development of the *access* programme

In establishing the attempts to make further education more accessible to disabled students, it is necessary to explore the development of the *access* programme. In investigating the developments behind *access* it is important to establish whether this programme genuinely encourages dyslexic people to progress on to higher education.

When exploring the mature student experience of *access*, it is important to establish how this course has developed. The literature concerning the development of *access* has focused on a range of issues. Some of these being the origins behind *access* and whether this programme is still targeting "non-traditional" groups.

Murray (1987) on behalf of the Further Education Unit (FEU) explored the background to *access*. This educational programme was established through a Department of Education and Science (DES) initiative in 1978. A selected number of Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) were invited to establish *access* programmes. The intention was to run these programmes, for a year, at Colleges of Further Education and Adult Community Centres.

Access was designed to attract people from non-traditional groups. Murray (1987) defines these groups as individuals who had previously poor experiences within the secondary educational system, such as people from ethnic minorities or disabled people. Other authors (Heron 1986; Kearney and Diamond, 1990; Kirton, 1999) reinforce this claim when highlighting that *access* was designed for ethnic minority groups. Benn and Burton (1994) acknowledge that it was aiming to attract students from working class backgrounds. Murray (1987) recognises that *access* is, therefore, providing non-traditional groups with a second chance to obtain qualifications, therefore, increasing the chance of achieving success within society.

Murray (1987) acknowledged that there is need for Institutions which run *access* programmes to recognise that prior educational experiences may have had a negative impact on the individual. It is necessary for Institutions to recognise these barriers and to place an emphasis on helping this group to develop their maximum potential.

When turning to the *access* programme itself, finance was identified as an important issue. *Access* students were not eligible for mandatory grants, therefore, they turned to Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) for discretionary grants. No additional funds were provided under the DES *Access* initiative for LEAs to help them meet the cost of providing such grants. Other issues mentioned were the need for a balanced curriculum. It is recognised that non-traditional learners would not accept a curriculum which is remote from life experience and teaching approaches which ignore or patronise experience.

Murray (1987) concluded that the provision of *access* is still patchy and students who were disadvantaged by background and income still faced obstacles, in particular through not receiving grants. However, he recognised that when *access* students move on to higher education, their academic performance is impressive.

Woollard (1988) provided further information about the origins of *access* suggesting that the motivation behind *access* was based on a commitment to attract people from ethnic minorities to certain professions in which they were under-represented, such as teaching. "Access to Higher Education" was a second aim behind this particular programme. Whilst originally *access* was designed for people from ethnic minorities, Woollard (1988) recognised that this programme of study was also targeting other groups such as women and other specified groups.

The work of Benn and Burton (1995) picked up on the principle of targeting non-traditional groups and attempt to establish whether this is occurring in reality with *access*. The research findings were structured around three headings, which were:

- results from the survey of *access* course directors;
- responsiveness of programmes to needs of targeting groups;
- results from the survey: AVAs (Authorised Validating Agencies).

The findings from the survey of *access* course directors were organised under two sub-headings: exclusive targeting and priority targeting.

Some of the findings from exclusive targeting revealed that seventy per cent of *access* programmes were exclusive to over 21s. It was also found that 11.8 per cent of programmes are exclusive to women; 5.9 per cent to the unemployed, 3.9 per cent to black people; 2 per cent to Asians; 1 per cent to other ethnic minority groups and none for disabled people.

Turning to priority targeting, *access* programmes seemed to be giving priority to a range of groups. The survey revealed that 28.4 per cent of programmes gave priority to women, 16 per cent to disabled people, 29.4 per cent to black people, 27.5 per cent to Asians, and 22.5 per cent to the unemployed. Benn and Burton

(1995) suggest these figures display a contradiction between a substantial number of programmes, 73.9 per cent stating that they do not apply positive discrimination. This contradiction shows that targeting policies may have no clear process of implementation.

Responsiveness of programmes to the needs of target groups was organised under four sub-headings. These were curriculum and syllabus, practical support, selection criteria and social purpose. Some of the issues to emerge were that the *access* syllabus reflected the needs of target groups. Two-thirds of the respondents identified support through timetabling, creche facilities and finance. However, it was noted that there was very little support available to people from ethnic minority groups, for example, only four courses offered language support. Other issues highlighted were that targeting in *access* was contradictory, apart from age being the main selection criteria, there was limited positive discrimination towards non-traditional groups.

Turning to the results from the AVAs survey: the data was organised under three sub-headings. These were the requirements of targeting by programmes, target policy and AVAs and social purpose. The role of AVAs is to provide a framework of national recognition for *access* programmes. The AVAs have various tasks which range between acting as awarding bodies for *access* programme certification and as a quality assurance agency. The emphasis on local requirements allows AVAs considerable influence in the shaping of *access* provision. Some of the issues highlighted were that 77.4 per cent of AVAs require their *access* programmes to have a targeting policy. It is acknowledged that 62.1 per cent of AVAs felt that *access* aimed to change the position of certain groups in society. 20.7 per cent felt *access* aimed to change the position of certain groups, but also to increase individual opportunities.

Benn and Burton (1995) concluded that *access* has a social purpose through its targeting commitment. However, it is recognised that current developments with selection criteria which place an emphasis on enthusiasm and motivation has resulted in mainstreaming of this educational opportunity. Connelly and Chakrabarti (1999) echo this view, in recognising the lack of success in attracting students from ethnic minority groups on to *access* programmes. Benn and Burton (1995) highlight the concern that *access* may not be able to target non-traditional groups.

In exploring the developments behind *access* it is necessary to consider whether this educational programme in reality offers dyslexic people the opportunity to enter higher education and obtain a qualification. By establishing the origins behind *access*, it is clearly a programme that has not always offered disabled people, including dyslexics, the opportunity to re-enter education and progress onto university. The question to be considered is why *access* programmes are now recognising disabled people, including dyslexics, as part of the non-traditional groups of students which they aim to attract. One possible explanation is because of the wider developments, such as the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) and the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996) attempting to improve access to further education for disabled people. The significance of these developments is that they have helped to raise the profile of disabled people and their right to have the same educational opportunities as their non-disabled peers which has resulted in further educational providers starting to take into consideration the needs of this group. It is, therefore, likely that before such developments that the needs of disabled people were probably not explicitly taken into consideration by *access* providers. The findings from Benn and Burton (1995) reinforce this view when they show that disabled people are now being included within the *access* environment. However, the rate of increase would suggest that disabled people, including dyslexics might

still be encountering a degree of marginalisation within the further educational environment.

If a dyslexic student were fortunate enough to select an *access* programme which has taken into consideration the needs of disabled people, the chance is increased of the individual student progressing on to higher education to gain a qualification. This is because institutions would already have the support in place to enable a dyslexic student to achieve academic success, which would help to develop a feeling of self-confidence for the individual students. The availability of immediate and comprehensive support is important because the duration of the programme, normally a year, means that a dyslexic student has to start receiving support immediately if they are to have the optimum opportunity to achieve the necessary academic success.

Alternatively, if a dyslexic student is not fortunate enough to select a dyslexia aware college it is likely that they would be placed at a disadvantage until the appropriate support is in place. The time taken to arrange help results in the individual having to play "catch-up" with their studies, which, when bearing in mind the duration of *access*, could result in their failing to achieve the academic success they desire within the required period. The implication of this experience is that it results in a dyslexic person not having a positive experience of further education, reinforces earlier negative experiences which has a knock-on effect of the individual not feeling capable of being able to progress onto higher education and gain a qualification.

The raising of disability awareness through developments such as the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996), helps to make *access* providers take into consideration the needs of disabled people, including people with dyslexia, in the design and delivery of this educational programme. The current picture is that *access* is

probably taking into consideration the needs of dyslexic students, but it has a long way to go until it achieves parity with the other groups it wishes to attract.

3:2:2 Mature student experience of access

As this study focuses on the student experience, it is necessary to explore the literature which has investigated the mature student experience whilst on *access*.

Some of the issues covered were: little discussion of disability; money and the mature student; mature student perception of further education; and the meaning of confidence for *access* students.

Brock (1990) highlights a notable omission within *access* literature, which is that there is very little discussion of disability. The only other references to disability within *access* literature are Findlay (1992) considering the issues of equal opportunities and disability; and Parker and West's (1996) report of a Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) initiative to improve transition for students with disabilities and dyslexia from further to higher education.

Brock (1990) considers four possible explanations why disability is not discussed. Firstly *access* policies have not considered disabled people as non-traditional students, whereas black students or mature women have been more readily located within this category. One reason why disability was not mentioned is because of a positive decision not to ghettoise disabled people.

A further reason why disability was not considered is because the market forces generated by employers dominate *access* debates. It is acknowledged that disabled people suffer as much, but different, discrimination as other groups such as black people, women and older people within the working world. However, it is recognised that *access* initiatives are more likely to benefit these target groups than disabled people.

Brock (1990) suggested that the needs of non-traditional groups such as black people have dominated the *access* debate because they have been more active in promoting their needs than disabled people. This political activity has resulted in *access* initiatives targeting more active groups. Brock (1990) concludes with the query about how long it will take *access* providers to consider the needs of disabled people.

Wallace (1988) highlights finance as an important part of the student experience of *access*. It is suggested that the availability of expert advice on personal finance is just as important as educational advice and guidance. The distinction is made between the financial position of mature and younger students, where the latter are under-funded and the former have:

the safety net of parental income and parental home. (Wallace, 1988, p.69).

Neville (1994) further highlights the financial difficulties facing *access* students in his survey of this programme within West Yorkshire. Over half of the survey group reported experiencing financial strain or serious financial strain, with men being the worse affected. Merrill and Mckie (1998) has also recognised finance as playing an important part of the mature student experience. It is recognised that mature students face financial difficulties within the educational environment.

The work of Patziarka (1987) explores the relations between students enrolled on *access*. It is recognised that mature students have shared similar life and educational experiences, which results in a feeling of unity and bonding developing within this group when they come together on this educational route. This supportive experience is characterised through mature students sharing the problems they face whilst on *access* and overcoming them together. Patziarka

(1987) suggests that *access* students, like most adult returners, have a strong determination to succeed, which is a result of previous life and educational experiences.

Neville (1994) explored why mature students undertook *access*, two questions were used to help the investigation of this educational route:

- how did adults hear about *access*?
- why did adults decide on *access*? (p.27).

Neville (1994) suggested that the majority of students had heard about *access* from others. This was through individuals who had previously completed *access* courses or who knew a friend who had. Other methods of discovery were individuals finding out about *access* through education or careers advisory services. Advertising in the press was also identified as another route of discovery. Other authors (Bond et al, 1997; Connelly and Chakrabarti, 1999) support this route of discovery through many adult students discovered their chosen course through media such as the press, radio, college prospectuses and leaflets.

An attempt to improve career opportunities was mainly cited as the reason for undertaking *access*. Wisker et al (1990) reinforce this view, they found similar reasons for starting *access*. Neville (1994) discovered that forty-four per cent of all students suggested that they started *access*:

... to help me get a better job in the future, and improve career prospects (Neville, 1994,p.298).

Access was identified as an opportunity to escape to more professional work.

The influence of friends and relatives were also identified as a factor which helped the respondents to return to education. Support from friends and family throughout the course was mentioned as important. It was noticeable that more men than women felt isolated from their families and friends whilst undertaking *access*. Some of the respondents also identified *access* as not being appropriate for them. It was suggested that *access* was out of synchronisation with the career patterns of others of a similar age. Some of the respondents also recalled their relatives and friends displaying a negative attitude towards their return to education. Despite these negative attitudes the respondents said that they were glad they had returned to education. Neville (1994) concludes from this survey that *access* courses in this region are attracting students from a semi- and un-skilled background.

The research of Williams et al (1988) contributed work on the mature student experience, revealing that mature students from middle class rather than a working class background were identified as the individuals mainly enrolling on *access*. The students enrolling on this programme would have completed full-time education at the age of 16 or younger. The reason given for leaving was mainly because of experiencing negative encounters whilst in the statutory education system.

A range of reasons were also identified why mature students selected *access* to higher education programmes including a lack of knowledge of direct entry into higher education and lack of confidence to do A-Levels. What influenced the students to return to education? Some of the reasons cited were a personal decision, encouragement by friends and family and unemployment. When exploring how mature students discovered *access*, four ways were highlighted, which were word of mouth, advertisements, academic staff and Jobcentre & Careers Service staff.

Another important issue to emerge was mature students being asked whether they had to make any sacrifices to allow them to be at College. Just over half the respondents said that they had to make financial sacrifices to attend college. The next sacrifice was reduced time for family, domestic chores and social life. Williams et al (1988) also explored whether the College catered adequately for the needs of women and black students. One shortcoming identified by the female students was the lack of creche facilities. The lack of co-ordination with school hours or terms was identified as a problem. It was concluded that the mature students were overall satisfied with their experience of education.

Karkalas and Mackenzie (1995) noted that *access* experience had encouraged students to undertake further studies through: increased confidence in the ability to learn; and the intellectual stimulation of subjects. The wider benefits of *access* emerged as an important part of the student experience. Karkalas and Mackenzie (1995) indicated that social factors were also prominent including new friendships; an increase in general confidence to deal with daily situations; and a sense of all-round growth and development. It was also highlighted that more men than women reported greater confidence in their learning ability.

Perceived personal changes resulting from the *access* were an important part of the student experience. The respondents identified nine areas, which were:

- ❑ tolerating others' views*
- ❑ being confident in expressing my own views*
- ❑ weighing up evidence*
- ❑ presenting reasoned arguments in speech and writing*
- ❑ thinking independently*
- ❑ being analytical*
- ❑ participating in group discussion*

- Exploring new fields of knowledge*
- Being excited by intellectual enquiry* (Karkalas and Mackenzie, 1995, p.31).
(greatest increase indicated by*)

Respondents encountered mixed relations with their partner and family. The male and female respondents who were married highlighted strained relations with their partners, but the male students recalled not as bad relations as their female peers. The younger students also recalled negative relations with their family to the extent where they were verbally and physically abused. Webb et al (1994) interviewees recalled their parents not encouraging them to carry on with their education.

Ethnographic research by McFadden (1995) explores why individuals who previously had a negative experience of education are returning with the belief that this sector can offer another chance to do something with their lives.

The respondents' experiences of statutory education helped to shape their attitudes towards education. At various stages of the school experience the respondents recalled negative experiences. Some of the respondents recalled the feeling that at junior school they were not going anywhere. The problem with these poor experiences of compulsory education is that they will not encourage individuals to return to the educational environment because of the concern that similar negative encounters will occur again.

The main reason why the respondents decided to return to education was because of the need to improve their lives. Some of the respondents cited their return to education was because of "dead-end" jobs and education was a "way out." It was recognised that some of the respondents felt the return to education was an opportunity to make up for previous failure. Some of the reasons highlighted were the need to make up for the lack of commitment towards their schooling and

parents pushing their child into work. Obtaining a qualification was viewed as an opportunity to make up for previous failure within their lives.

Respondents recalled their fears of statutory education. Some of the issues highlighted were the fear of being caught between working and middle class cultures. Other fears highlighted by the respondents were the concern about whether they would meet university standards and the fear of failure when progressing into higher education. McFadden (1995) concluded that prior educational experience of mature students and their identities as learners were normally considered. A greater awareness of previous schooling and its emotional consequences may help to increase the chance of adults achieving educational success.

Stephenson and Percy (1989) investigated the mature student experience through exploring the meaning of confidence. Four key characteristics emerged from their investigation, which were:

- ❑ returning to education to obtain a better job, therefore obtain future security;
- ❑ current job encouraged them to return to education;
- ❑ return to education because they wanted to contribute to children's education;
- ❑ return to education because of a specific experience.

Stephenson and Percy (1989) suggested that the respondents display a range of states of confidence within their educational experiences. The interviews suggest - that self-confidence is necessary for a mature student to optimise educational experience. Even if the individual has confidence when entering the educational environment, it is necessary for this feeling to be developed further if an adult student is to achieve success. Indications of success would be getting good grades, passing examinations and speaking in front of others. Stephenson and Percy (1989) concluded that adults returning to study perceive themselves as "in a hurry"

within the educational environment. There is the concern that this group may be tempted to rush through the educational system without fully appreciating what it can offer.

Would encounters like these encourage a dyslexic person to progress on to university and gain a qualification? It is possible that a dyslexic person may be encouraged to progress onto University, but a number of factors need to be in place if this move is to be successful.

The lack of reference to disability within the *access* movement suggests that disabled people such as dyslexic students may encounter difficulties accessing the further educational environment. It results in disabled people being marginalised. To an extent this marginalisation was tackled through legislation such as the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), which aimed to improve access for disabled people into further and higher education. The work of Brock (1990) highlights that it was only in the 1990s that the educational needs of disabled people became an issue and were tackled in any co-ordinated, other manner through legislation or FEFC supported investigations into the field of disability and further education. Would the recent recognition of the needs of disabled people affect dyslexic students progressing into higher education through *access* today? It is possible that dyslexic students may still encounter difficulties through *access* staff failing to recognise their disability and providing inappropriate support, or institutions not being prepared to identify or support this group. This could be because of limited staff or institutional experience of dyslexic students. Alternatively, the *access* programme itself, through the method of delivery and assessment, may be too inflexible to help dyslexic students reach their full academic potential. In taking into account the developments to improve access for disabled people, the dyslexic student experience will be very much dependent on

which Institution they select and how this college has chosen to interpret attempts to encourage disabled people to re-enter the educational environment.

Whilst recognising that the further educational environment is becoming more accessible, it is important to consider whether there are any other factors in place which may influence dyslexic students to progress on to higher education. One important issue is finance, which was identified as an important part of the mature student experience - whether disabled or not. The question of finance may, therefore, help to influence whether or not an individual student will decide to return to education and progress on to university. Clearly a lack of finance may help to influence if a person will re-enter the further educational environment. A dyslexic person may decide not to re-enter the educational environment if they feel that they cannot afford it. Therefore the deciding factor may be whether or not a student can rely on others, such as partner or parents, to provide financial support to help them to survive on *access*. If a student decides to return to education through *access* and struggles financially, it is possible that they will not want to encounter similar experiences if they progress on to university.

3:2:3 Disabled adult experience of education

The literature concerning a disabled adult's experience of education has focused on a range of issues. Existing research has provided an insight into their educational experiences whilst at school and college; the experiences of dyslexic and deaf adults enrolled on *access* programmes; and the value of a discrete educational provision for disabled adults within continuing education.

The Literature has mainly focused on the educational experiences of disabled adults within further and higher education (Ash et al, 1997; Low, 1996; Poussu-Olli, 1999; Borland and James, 1999).

Leicester and Lovell (1997) investigates the educational experiences of disabled adults as students and as parents of disabled children.

One important area was the provision of segregated education, which was criticised by Leicester and Lovell (1997) because it has separated disabled and non-disabled children from each other. The effect of this separation is often disabled children having negative experiences of education and when disabled and non-disabled people come into contact with each other, the latter group is uncertain about how to react, often resulting in disabled people being treated negatively.

Another important issue to emerge from the school encounter was the experience of statementing. This educational provision would involve a disabled child's needs being identified, therefore appropriate support such as special teachers and teaching provision being made available by the student's school and Local Educational Authority. On the whole statementing was viewed in a positive light. This was because this procedure identified the child's educational needs and helped parents to understand their child's difficulties. However, statementing was criticised because schools were not able to meet these educational needs, usually because of the lack of resources.

To tackle the negative attitudes which disabled people face there was an emphasis on integrating disabled children into mainstream schools. It was felt that integration would open the eyes of non-disabled people and give them a new outlook (Leicester and Lovell, 1997), creating a more inclusive society.

Experiences of post-school education and training, the respondents identified negative experiences with a range of health care professionals and other professionals such as Career Advisers. Doctors and health workers were criticised by the respondents as not being good listeners and not providing full information. This point is highlighted through how one of the researchers became aware of her

multiple sclerosis (Leicester and Lovell, 1997). It was highlighted that disabled people had to perform better than others to overcome the social prejudices of their non-disabled peers. In post-school education and training there is a need to offer more educational opportunities available to disabled people within mainstream education, which will help to create a more inclusive society.

Leicester (1999) focused on the experiences of disabled students from school through to university. Some of the adults interviewed recalled little recognition of their adult status, whilst at college, by staff. The lack of recognition of adult status suggests that there is little knowledge of this group and the potential they have to achieve academic success. Other disabled students recalled having to work a lot harder with their studies to achieve academic success.

The research of Dale and Green (1998) investigated a disabled adult experience through exploring the value of a discrete educational provision for this group. Their findings were organised under two main headings:

- ❑ the disadvantages of integrated provision;
- ❑ the advantages of discrete provision.

Among the disadvantages of integrated provision were the lack of tutor experience or understanding of the needs of disabled students at school and college. Support for this view comes from "Student Voices" (Skill, 1996) where some students felt that their presence in class was a problem for some tutors. The problem with a lack of knowledge being displayed by teachers is that it has the potential to damage the individual's confidence in their own academic abilities and the belief that disabled people would not achieve academic success. Another disadvantage of the integrated provision is the feeling of isolation within the mainstream educational system, respondents recalled the negative stereotyping they encountered whilst at school.

Turning to the advantages of a discrete educational provision, one of the main advantages was that many disabled students felt there was a shared understanding of what it felt like to be disabled. Visually impaired students felt more comfortable with other adults with a similar disability (Dale and Green, 1998). The advantage of students studying together with similar disabilities is that there is a shared understanding of the barriers that this group faces within the educational environment.

Another positive aspect of discrete provision was disabled students feeling more confident in tutors, because they had an understanding of students' educational needs. It was felt that employing disabled tutors, such as a dyslexic tutor for dyslexia courses, was helpful to provide reassurance and helps to remove psychological barriers. The value of employing dyslexic tutors is that it shows that disabled people such as dyslexics can achieve educational success. It is recognised that employing dyslexic tutors may also create a culture of dependency.

The value of a discrete educational provision is that it is likely to help disabled students to get used to studying again. Skill (1996) reinforced this view, where disabled students emphasised the importance of a tailor-made learning environment. The research by Dale and Green (1998) concluded that targeted *access* to Higher Education programmes for the whole group is much more powerful than for an individual.

Preece (1995) investigated disabled adults' educational experiences through exploring the encounters of 44 physically disabled individuals in the North West of England.

Respondents main reason for their return to education was based around a general interest and enjoyment of learning. Other reasons given for the return to education

were a means of getting out of the house and the opportunity for social integration.

When exploring the respondent experiences of course attendance and satisfaction one of the main issues cited was the effect of illness. It was recognised that illness, pain or physical agility may restrict the ability of the individual to achieve the same as their non-disabled peers. Not being able to keep pace within set work schedules was also identified as important. Physical access issues were also identified as an important part of the student experience, including a lack of ramps, lack of care support and the unsuitability of evening classes. There was also a reference to staff attitudes, which were perceived as negative, mainly focused around staff perception of what a disability can mean.

Four categories of recommendation emerged as an attempt to improve the adult education provision. Some of the key recommendations were that physical accessibility was a priority, which is understandable because the respondents were wheelchair users. Some suggestions made were that wheelchair users should test out toilet facilities and classrooms for space. Attitudes were identified as important, with the respondents requiring to be treated without condescension. Practical and medical needs were also identified as important, ranging from reliable transport, relevant and appropriate finance for part-time and full-time students, whereas others identified adapted desks, tables and the need for a Disabled Students' Adviser. Preece (1995) concluded that one important priority was the need for course planning in consultation with disabled people.

Preece (1996) further investigates' disabled adults' educational experience through exploring the encounters of ten individuals with working class connections. The impact of institutions such as school and hospitals helped to shape disabled adults' experience. It was recognised that the individuals and schools that they came into contact with shaped the respondents' behaviour as adults, their awareness of

entitlements, knowledge and the curriculum. This point was supported by one of the respondents recalling how her doctor told her that she should leave school irrespective of her academic potential. The problem here is that the professional and medical perceptions of physical disability are taking precedence over academic ability. The respondents also recalled the negative attitude of professionals being mirrored by their families, which had the effect of reducing the chances of this group achieving academic success.

The role of disability and the day centre was also explored within the respondents' educational experiences. The main experience to emerge was the respondents feeling bored within the day centre. Preece (1996) suggests that day centres reflect the culture of marginality and segregation which disabled people face within society. It was also recognised that the day centre reinforced the dispossessed status of disability, an image of low socio-economic status and a culture of dependency, with limited self-advocacy or opportunity for autonomy.

Exploring working class expectations and educational goals the respondents felt educational opportunities were external to their lives. This resulted in the respondents being dissuaded from continuing with their education, or excluding themselves from this opportunity. Other respondents indicated little recognition of the value of formal learning and its work-related value. The lack of awareness by teachers that disabled people can achieve academic success influences this group's attitudes towards education. Respondents questioned the value of progressing on to further and higher education, because it was felt that the respondents' children would have similar experiences to their parents' encountered at school. Preece (1996) concluded with the hope that this research suggested that educational provision could be shaped by listening to potential participants.

Taylor (1996) investigated the experiences of deaf adults enrolled on social work and youth & community work training programmes. The project involved deaf people from the start and sought to obtain views on what they considered to be important about their experiences of these programmes. All the respondents indicated that they wanted to progress to higher education. The choice of institution was dependent on the support provision available. To obtain the necessary support the respondents were prepared to move nearer to the institution.

The transition to higher education was identified as a problem area by the respondents. Among the issues raised were a lack of awareness displayed by colleges about the different methods of communication, and an over-reliance on lip-reading as a teaching tool. Another issue to emerge was the lack of awareness of deaf culture. Taylor (1996) suggests that these issues result in deaf people preferring institutions that have an established record in supporting deaf students.

There was particular criticism of the lack of facilities to enable the students to study. Respondents listed a range of equipment that they thought would be appropriate and highlighted other support, such as sign-language interpreters, note-takers and teaching support workers. In relation to the direct teaching experience three main areas were identified. These were personal tutor support, the behaviour of lecturers in the classroom, and the absence and inadequacy of teaching material on deafness and disability. The respondents felt there was little input on deafness or representations of deaf people in course material.

The research revealed an additional personal responsibility placed on deaf students. It was assumed that they would manage whatever facilities were available to assist them with their studies. Furthermore, deaf students accepted the responsibility of teaching other students and academics about deafness, rather

than the institution acknowledging its responsibility. This resulted in deaf students spending more time studying than did hearing students to keep up with their work.

The respondents highlighted problems with the work and study environment. The central issues being noise levels too high for deaf students to interact with other students, which clearly affects their social and educational experiences; concerns over lack of choice; and personal safety while staying in halls of residence.

Palfreman-Kay (1998) investigated the experiences of disabled adults enrolled on *access* programmes. The research presented findings from the first stage of a study which has investigated the experiences of dyslexic and deaf adults enrolled on *access* programmes at colleges of further education which are affiliated to De Montfort University.

Through exploring the respondents' prior educational experiences before *access*, it was apparent there was little recognition of deafness and dyslexia. Palfreman-Kay (1998) highlighted that the lack of awareness resulted in the respondents developing a range of coping strategies to survive compulsory education. He goes on to suggest that prior educational experiences may act as a barrier throughout the educational experience.

Reasons for undertaking *access* were also identified as a part of a disabled adult experience. Palfreman-Kay (1998) discovered that the majority of the respondents selected *access* because it was viewed as an entry route into higher education. It is important to note that none of the students identified their disability as a reason for undertaking *access*.

The discovery of dyslexia emerged as another important part of a disabled student's experience. This stage of research observed that dyslexia was discovered

through either college screening or marking procedures for written work. When the respondents discovered their dyslexia they displayed feelings of anger and relief.

Student relationships were another important part of a disabled adult experience of *access*. Respondents recalled positive awareness being displayed by their peers. Palfreman-Kay and Taylor (2000) explore the issues concerned with the nature of relationships between disabled students and their non-disabled peers in further education. One dyslexic respondent viewed their disability as an opportunity to form good relations with fellow students through the support that they could provide to each other. Other students noticed that once their dyslexia was discovered, fellow students displayed a supportive attitude. The positive response to the dyslexic respondents was possibly because fellow students are able to identify with these individuals because they had similar poor experiences of compulsory education.

The experiences of the deaf respondents showed they displayed difficulties in forming good relations with fellow *access* students. Palfreman-Kay (1998) suggested that the difficulty in forming relations with hearing students may be because of bad experiences that deaf students do not wish to repeat. Lack of awareness of deaf issues produces a further obstacle between deaf and hearing students. This lack of awareness is because hearing people assume that everyone is able to speak and hear.

Educational support was identified as an important part of the student experience. Some of the dyslexic respondents recalled fellow students providing educational support, which helps to create a feeling of greater inclusion, helps to raise awareness within and outside the educational environment.

Negative awareness was another part of the student experience: one respondent felt that they were being treated as an object of humour. Palfreman-Kay (1998) suggests that these responses can act as an obstacle to forming good relations between students. The wrong type of awareness can possibly be attributed to this being the first time the other students had come into contact with a disabled person. It was also suggested that the negative portrayal of disability in the media may further contribute to this lack of awareness.

Relationships between fellow disabled students were a further part of the student experience. One dyslexic respondent talked about her friendship with another dyslexic *access* student. Deaf respondents also recalled similar positive experiences with fellow deaf students. Palfreman-Kay (1998) suggests that disability is acting as a device to create another community within the student body. It is helping to create a sub-cultural identity for respondents. When disabled students meet, whatever their disability, they will experience more positive relations with fellow disabled students because their disability is acting as a form of cultural identity.

Palfreman-Kay (1998) concluded that the first stage of his research had shown that *access* was attracting disabled students back into education. It was concluded that raising and promoting disability awareness should help to promote the idea of inclusion and unity within the student body.

When exploring a disabled adult's educational experience, it is necessary to consider whether these encounters will really encourage dyslexic people to enter higher education and gain a qualification. A dyslexic person may be encouraged to return to the educational environment through *access*, but there are numerous barriers which they would have to overcome if they are to achieve success. The main problem area would be the individual student overcoming their prior negative experience of education, therefore, believing that teachers and their peers

would not ridicule them. The individual student has to believe that their return to education is a second chance to achieve academic success, and therefore, to improve their life opportunities.

The opportunity to study with students from similar backgrounds may encourage a dyslexic person to return to education. Identification occurs between fellow students who previously experienced failure within the educational system. Coming together within this context dyslexic students may come into contact with fellow disabled students which might develop the feeling of self-belief that they can achieve academic success. Whether or not a dyslexic student comes into contact with disabled peers, it is likely that these individuals would develop the confidence that they can achieve academic success.

It is possible that if a dyslexic student has a positive *access* experience it is likely that they will share these encounters with individuals outside the educational environment. This may encourage other dyslexics or other individuals who previously encountered a poor educational experience to re-enter the educational environment through *access*.

However, the lack of student and staff knowledge about dyslexia on *access* programmes, as revealed by Palfreman-Kay (1998), suggests that it is not guaranteed that a dyslexic student will have a positive experience of this educational route. Again the lack of experience displayed by college staff and students was probably more a result of prior limited contact with dyslexic people. Alternatively, the failure of institutions to raise disability awareness through staff development programmes could explain the limited knowledge and understanding of the needs of disabled people.

When taking into consideration the wider developments within further education to encourage disabled people to continue or return to education, it seems two

different pictures of this particular sector are being offered. The wider picture intends to suggest that further education is becoming more accessible to dyslexic people. However, the grass roots picture suggests that there is a variation in knowledge of disability which results in a positive experience being more dependent on chance. It is through prior experience that institutions have had the opportunity to develop appropriate policies and support to help this group. The micro-picture suggests that the developments to improve accessibility to further education for dyslexic people are still filtering throughout this particular educational environment. The problem with this bottom-up approach is that a dyslexic person may be encouraged to return to education through *access* because of the wider developments within further education but again encounters failure. This is because of the lack of knowledge about dyslexia and the necessary support displayed at their selected college by staff and students. The system is not offering the same educational opportunities to all dyslexic students.

3:3 Higher Education and disability

Having described the attempts to make further education more accessible for disabled students, it is now necessary to establish what moves there have been in higher education. One of the initial developments occurred in 1990, through the government introducing modifications to the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). Hurst (1998) details what this student group could apply for after these changes:

...(a) an additional general allowance to cover costs incurred directly as a result of participating in higher education and having a disability – for example more frequent use of telephones, photocopiers.

[In 2000-2001 the maximum available was £1,385];

(b) an allowance for the purchase of special equipment – for example a cassette recorder, a lap-top computer, the assumption being that the equipment will be useful throughout the course, although it is sometimes possible to seek additional money to upgrade equipment.

[In 2000-2001 the maximum available was £4,155];

(c) an allowance to cover the costs of non-medical personal assistance – for example to buy the services of signers, notetakers etc.

[In 2000-2001 the maximum available was £10,505].

(p.153).

The value of this funding is that it helps disabled students to operate on an equal academic footing to their non-disabled peers, therefore increasing the chance of achieving academic success. Further developments within the field have occurred through the Funding Council considering whether or not disabled students will attract a premium rating to the institution. This approach from 1999-2000 would result in funds being allocated directly to the University to help it meet the costs of supporting the needs of individual disabled students. The funding premium for this group is calculated on the number of undergraduates who receive a DSA. The Funding Council plans to introduce this premium for the 2000-01 academic year when definitive data on DSAs will be available. The response to Funding Council consultation (HEFCE, 98/39) on this topic suggests that there is widespread support for this new approach to meeting the support needs of this group.

As with Further Education, moves toward making this sector more accessible to disabled students started with the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). Through the Funding Council being required to have regard for the needs of disabled students, the English Funding Council established an Advisory Group on Widening Participation. It established the need to support developments for disabled students within higher education. The way in which the Funding Council has tackled this requirement has been through its Special Initiative Programme. Through this scheme institutions were invited to bid for funds to support their own projects. The Special Initiative programme started in 1993-4, when £3 million was set aside, and has carried on at various stages throughout the 1990s. The projects supported by the Funding Council covered areas ranging between

dyslexia, capital development projects, developing information technology applications and learning support. It was during the Special Initiative Programme 1994-95 that the Council commissioned the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (Skill) to evaluate the impact and achievements of the initiatives.

The next development within higher education to influence the position of disabled students was through the National Committee of Inquiry (Dearing Report). It was required to consider:

...the definition and purpose of Higher Education, teaching and research, the shape, size, and structure of the system, the wider contribution of Higher Education to national life, and funding issues. (Hurst, 1998, p.163).

Whatever the outcomes of this inquiry, it was clear it would influence the position of disabled students for some considerable time. The opportunity to highlight the needs of disabled students came when Skill was invited to submit written evidence to the Committee. After submitting this written evidence in February 1997, Skill was invited to send a small delegation to give oral evidence to the Committee. Hurst (1999) highlighted the value of these developments.

...the attention of the committee was drawn to the distinction between those factors for which the sector itself could be held responsible (for example, the allocation of finances between and within institutions, physical access to buildings, staff attitudes and prejudices, and lack of appropriate support systems) and those outside its control (for example, the limited availability of practical support, such as sign language interpreters, the poor education provided in some special schools/Colleges and its impact on qualifications prior to entry, and the low expectations of some teachers, parents and students themselves). (Hurst, 1999, p.68).

The significance of this approach is that it identified the barriers, which will help to build on the developments already in place, therefore, helping to make this sector more accessible to disabled students.

There were references to disability throughout the report. Chapter One acknowledged that disabled people are under-represented in Higher Education.

Apart from the economic imperative, there are other influences pointing to resumed growth. Unless we address the under-representation of those from lower socio-economic groups we may face increasingly socially divisive consequences. As a matter of equity, we need to reduce the under-representation of certain ethnic groups, and those with disabilities. (NCIHE, 1997a: Paragraph 1.17).

Whilst acknowledging that disabled students were under-represented in higher education, there is no discussion on widening participation until chapter 7.

One issue to affect disabled students was finance, which was tackled in Chapter 17. The important recommendation here was that the DSA should be extended to part-time and postgraduate students.

(We recommend) to the government that it extends the scope of the Disabled Students Allowance so that it is available without a parental means test and to part-time students, postgraduate students, and those who have become disabled who wish to obtain a second Higher Education qualification. (NCIHE, 1997a: Recommendation 6).

This recommendation is a move in the right direction, because it helps to make this sector more accessible by recognising the additional costs of studying and that a disabled person may wish to enter the higher educational sector at various stages of their life. It is important to note that the DSA will be extended to part-time students from the academic year 2000-2001. Disabled students who are enrolling on programmes of study which are equivalent to fifty per cent or more of a full time course will be entitled to claim this grant. It is unfortunate that the DSA will not be available to those who are undertaking less than fifty per cent of a full time course, as this group could provide an incentive for those students to increase their involvement in Higher Education.

Report Six referred to disability and covered Widening Participation in Higher Education by students from lower socio-economic groups and students with disabilities. Section Four of this report highlighted the fact that there is a lack of detailed and accurate information about the number of disabled students within Higher Education. There is also a reference to other developments within the field of education such as the role of Skill (Paragraph 4.7); and some of the additional costs incurred and issues around the DSA (Paragraph 4.13-4.16). Section Five makes a number of recommendations such as the normalisation of disability, disability awareness and disability sensitivity (Paragraph 5.1). Hurst (1999) suggests these recommendations show application of the Social Model of Disability. A further important part of Report 6 is its proposal for a comprehensive approach to disability within a strategic framework. It is acknowledged that there are scarce resources and disability issues are often placed at a low priority. One cost-effective approach is specialisation, with institutions being recognised as centres of excellence. Whilst considering this option:

...report six notes that this approach is unacceptable since it would limit choice for students and could also lead to limitations on the part of those with a reputation for the quality of their provision. (Hurst, 1999,p.78).

The significance of recognising the difficulties associated with centres of excellence shows the need to provide disabled students with the same range of choices and opportunities as their non-disabled peers, which helps to create a more inclusive approach to education.

Another proposal within the report suggests a move towards looking at the position of disabled students within a negative context. This occurs when considering the disparities between full and part-time students and the difficulties associated with the DSA.

Since the DSA is the principal means by which students with disabilities gain any financial support in recognition of their additional costs, it would be altogether fairer if the allowance were a fixed rate to the students by disability, reasonably reflecting the costs typically incurred by those with different disabilities. It should be a grant to a fixed maximum with a loan option to a maximum available thereafter. (NCIHE, 1997b: Paragraph 5.12).

The problem with this recommendation is that it ignores far too many factors such as the nature and location of the course. Hurst (1999) suggests this approach reverts back to a Medical Model of Disability and suggests no serious belief in the Social Model of Disability.

So the question needs to be asked what this report means for disabled students within higher education? When the Dearing report is placed in context with previous and recent developments such as the establishment of the National Disability Co-ordination and Development Team (NDT) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) having developed a code of practice for disabled students, one might suggest that this sector is progressively becoming more accessible to disabled students.

The next attempt by the English Funding Council to improve access for disabled students is shown through its report on "Disability Statements: A Guide for Good Practice" (HEFCE, 98/66). This report emerged because of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) requiring the Funding Council to require higher educational institutions to produce disability statements. As with further education, the statements require institutions to detail the facilities they have in place for this group. This report made twenty-two recommendations, which covered topics such as format and presentation. One of its key recommendations was that:

...the statement should be the main information document for potential students with disabilities. The exact format and nature of the 'statement' should be down to the individual institution's choice – HEFCE guidelines should not be restrictive but they should encourage good practice in terms of coverage, language and presentation. (HEFCE, 98/66, p.1).

The value of the Statement is that it helps to inform disabled students of the range of facilities that are in place for them. The significance of this approach is that it helps disabled students to determine which institutions are more likely to suit their needs.

Another attempt to improve access to higher education was through the Funding Councils for England and Wales' report "Guidance on base-line provision for disabled students in higher education institutions" (HEFCE, 99/04). This report aimed to detail the minimum level of support that each institution should provide for disabled students. It states base line provision should include the following:

...a. Disability Statement setting out the institution's policies, support services and implementation strategy for students with disabilities.

b. An admissions policy and procedures that specifically address the needs of disabled students. [All HEIs should maintain and monitor statistics about applications and enrolment rates for disabled students.]

c. A code of practice governing the circulation of personal information, to preserve appropriate levels of confidentiality.

d. The provision of services to meet assessed needs.

e. Clear internal communication and referral policies.

f. Arrangements to monitor the provision of support services.

g. Access to networks of suitably trained support workers.

- h. An institution-wide policy and procedure to cover examinations and assessments.
- i. Staff development programme to cover information about students with disabilities and support available.
- j. Dedicated staff including a permanently employed disability co-ordinator, plus adequate administrative staff to support the co-ordinator. A member of the senior management team should be made responsible for disability issues.
- k. An estates strategy to cover physical access issues and to ensure the needs of all disabled groups are considered in the design or refurbishment of buildings.
- l. Procedures to ensure that policies, programmes and their impact and effectiveness are subject to regular monitoring and evaluation. (HEFCE, 99/04, p.1-2).

The significance of defining what would constitute as a base-line provision is that it is an attempt by the Funding Council to provide guidance on how to develop an inclusive provision for disabled students. It also shows recognition that if opportunities are to be improved for disabled student's an institution - wide approach is required.

The potential for some dyslexic students more than others to benefit from their experience of higher education is further shown through Institutions which have bid for, and successfully obtained, funds under the Special Initiative Programme for disabled students. The value of this Funding Council programme is that it has helped to raise and promote the needs of disabled students within the higher educational environment by providing institutions with the funds to develop a support provision to meet the needs of disabled students. The problem with this approach for dyslexic students is that it has the potential to restrict student choice because not all institutions offer a dyslexic provision. The implication of this varied support provision is that a dyslexic student is not able to progress onto the University of their choice or has to settle for their second choice.

Attempts to build on the Special Initiative Programme and enhance the position for disabled students are reflected through the Funding Council's defining what is expected as a basic provision for this group. The value of stating what is a basic provision for disabled students recognises that their inclusion in the higher educational environment, which helps to create a more inclusive educational sector. The significance of established support is that it shows to prospective dyslexic students that their needs are recognised, which could act as an influencing factor over whether they decide to progress on to University. Whilst defining a basic provision for disabled students is a step in the right direction, the problem with this approach is that it is only providing guidance to institutions on how to support this group. There is a requirement for institutions to put any support in place for disabled students, which results in choice again being restricted for this group.

A range of factors, such as knowledge of access to the DSA, and being able to select an institution which is committed to improving access for non-traditional groups, have to be in place if they are going to gain the most from this particular educational experience.

In charting the developments for disabled students within the educational environment there seem to have been progressive attempts to open up secondary, further and the higher educational sector for this group. These increase the chances of disabled people obtaining academic qualifications within any of these educational sectors. The significance of these developments is that through bringing disabled and non-disabled people together, this helps to challenge negative attitudes which disabled people face, and helps to create a more inclusive and diverse society.

In establishing that *access* has the potential to offer dyslexic people the opportunity to gain a qualification, it is necessary to consider whether this group would be encouraged to make the move on to University. At face value the wider developments within higher education to improve access for disabled people have the potential to attract dyslexic students into higher education. This positive picture is reflected through dyslexic students being entitled to additional grants, such as the DSA, to help them with their studies. To claim this form of financial help disabled students such as dyslexics need to provide evidence of their disability, for example an Educational Psychologist's report. After providing this information disabled students are required to have an assessment of their learning needs for the selected programme of study. The recommendations from the assessment of need report are used to put help in place for the individual student, whether it is technical or personal support. However, with the DSA being only available to certain students who receive grants, it is excluding dyslexic students who do not meet the necessary criteria. However, the recommendation of the Dearing Report that the DSAs should be extended to part-time and postgraduate disabled students, attempts to tackle the problem that some disabled students face in obtaining this particular grant. The picture that emerges is that some dyslexic students are more likely to benefit from their experience of higher education than their peers because of their entitlement to the DSA.

3:4 Discussion

The literature suggests that *access* has the potential to offer dyslexic people the opportunity to enter higher education and gain a qualification. However, it is the experience of the compulsory and further educational sector, which has the potential to influence whether or not a dyslexic person will progress on to university.

When exploring compulsory education it has the potential to shape the educational and life opportunities available to dyslexic people. The various moves towards inclusion, such as statementing, through the 1981 Education Act, suggest that this sector has the potential to help dyslexic students achieve academic success. However, as the literature has shown these developments towards inclusion still have not provided dyslexic students with equivalent educational experience to their non-dyslexic peers. In fact the problems within this sector have probably resulted in dyslexic children still feeling excluded, therefore, unable to achieve the academic success of which they are capable. It seems that dyslexic students will more than likely experience a positive encounter of this sector if they are fortunate enough to select a school, teachers and LEA who have knowledge of dyslexia and are, therefore, able to provide appropriate support.

Taking into consideration the position of dyslexic students, raises the question about what happens to the dyslexics who were not fortunate enough to receive the support to which they were entitled? It is likely that these individuals would experience relative failure and would wish to leave the sector because of their determination not to encounter such negative experience again (Riddick et al, 1997).

Turning to further education there seems to be a greater chance of dyslexic students receiving support. This is reflected through the FEFC attempting to improve access for disabled through mainstream additional funding to support this group. Instead of having an individual approach, through policies such as statementing process the Funding Council has tried to adopt a more institutional policy by allowing colleges to build in the financial cost of providing a disability provision within College budgets. The value of this approach is that it helps to create a more enabling educational environment.

Whilst acknowledging the positive effect of the wider developments to improve access, it remains more likely that a dyslexic student who is already aware of their disability, is in a better position to receive help. Their prior educational experiences make these individuals more aware of their needs. This is in contrast to a dyslexic person who perhaps discovers their disability through their return to education to improve their life opportunities. The problem with late discovery occurred at two levels. Firstly, the individual student has to get used to adjusting to their new diagnosis of dyslexia. Secondly, if the college which the student attends does not have the support or experience to assist this group, it is likely that they will experience failure, as reflected through the respondents' experiences of college before *access*. However, if a dyslexic student is able to select an institution which has experience of supporting dyslexic students at an institutional and programme level it will increase the chances of the individual achieving academic success and progressing onto university.

If a dyslexic student is able to progress through the compulsory and further educational sectors it is possible that they will achieve success, such as acquiring qualifications which encourages these individuals to progress on to university, because they have the coping strategies which they would have developed from their previous educational experiences and the determination to achieve academic success.

When a dyslexic student enters the higher educational environment they will discover a support provision available to them, through grants and institutional support, to assist them with their studies, with the aim of trying to provide the same opportunities available to their non-disabled peers. One major difference between higher, compulsory and further education is the availability of the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) as an additional grant direct to individuals.

The significance of this grant for dyslexic students is that it provides them with a support package that aims to meet their individual needs, therefore allowing this group to access higher education. Other developments within higher education, such as offering additional institutional funds to establish a disability provision, helps to create a more inclusive educational environment. The significance of this approach is that it has the potential to encourage universities to develop a provision for dyslexic students, which will have the effect of increasing student choice.

In comparing the three sectors, it is evident that there is different support in place at various levels of each educational sector to help dyslexic students. However, the picture that emerges is that there is a back-to-front approach towards supporting disabled students as a whole within the educational environment. Compulsory education appears not be prepared as further and higher education to support the needs of disabled students. In one respect this seems to be a bizarre situation because one would expect appropriate support to be provided during compulsory education, as this would allow individual students to develop the necessary academic skills that they require to help them progress through the various educational sectors. One potential value of a supportive approach at the compulsory stage of the educational experience is that it may help to challenge and overcome the negative barriers faced by disabled people through themselves and their non-disabled peers interacting academically and socially.

An explanation for this “back-to-front” approach is probably based on cost, as it is probably less costly to provide appropriate support at the later stages of the educational experiences such as college and university because of the much smaller number of claims. The variation in provision can, therefore, act as a tool to reduce the number of disabled students progressing through the educational system. Therefore, the funding acts as a control on the demand that disabled

students will place on the educational environment and the resources available to support this group. The variation in support is therefore a deliberate attempt to encourage disabled students to drop out of the educational environment, whether it is at a compulsory or further education level.

To overcome this barrier there is a need to provide joined up support for disabled students throughout the educational system. This could involve a redistribution of resources to focus on compulsory education which could help to create an inclusive educational environment. This could help to provide the same academic opportunities available to disabled students and their non-disabled peers. When progressing on to further and higher education the focus on inclusion during compulsory education should help to increase knowledge of the needs of disabled students. However, to embed the inclusive environment there is a need to provide a similar support provision, whether this is one-to-one support, or access to information technology which would help to remove the variation between sectors. The recent recommendations of the report from the Disability Rights Task Force (DRTF) (1999) and consultation by the British (Labour) government on education are possibly an opportunity to move towards creating a more inclusive educational environment and therefore a more inclusive wider society.

Overall, *access* programmes has the potential to encourage dyslexic students to progress on to higher education and gain a qualification. However, the degree of success that a dyslexic student can achieve is very much dependent on whether the school, college and university they attend have an established provision towards supporting dyslexic students.

Chapter 4

Methodology and Research tools

The aim of this chapter is to show how Grounded Theory and the research tools were used to analyse and collect the data generated from the student and staff interviews.

4:1 The role of theory

For this research the principles of Grounded Theory analysis were used to assist with data analysis. Grounded Theory aims to generate a theory, based on empirical research, and it is necessary to establish what type of theories will be generated. The theories that are produced through Grounded Theory analysis are Substantive, Formal and Cumulative Theories.

So the theories developed from this study aim to provide an interpretation of the student experience. When providing any interpretation it is important to answer the questions over whether or not the explanations that are being proposed display an accurate picture of the social site. Strauss and Corbin (1994) suggest that, whatever theory or theories are proposed, they are provisional, because everyone has different interpretations of the data. They go on to say that:

...many other kinds of knowledge theories are limited in time: Researchers and theorists are not gods, but men and when living in certain eras, immersed in certain societies, subject to current ideas and ideologies, and so forth. (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p.279).

Cultural bias is likely in whatever theory or theories are used to explain the social site under investigation because these are based on one particular interpretation, such as that of the researcher. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that any explanation is provisional, because someone else may have a different interpretation or wish to elaborate on the proposed theory or theories.

The reason for exploring the theories to emerge from this study is to establish what they are telling us about the student experience. Through this process the researcher is able to show to wider audiences the barriers dyslexics encounter within the educational environment. The significance of this approach is that any researcher is, therefore, potentially able to develop recommendations that will help to improve the position of disabled people.

4:1:1 Grounded Theory and Substantive Theory

When generating an explanation for particular events or occurrences through Grounded Theory analysis, the researcher firstly needs to generate a Substantive Theory. This is achieved through the comparative method (Layder, 1993).

This method requires the researcher to look for similarities and differences between the data to help in the development of Substantive, then Formal Theory, to explain the position of the social group under investigation.

Substantive Theory aims to explain specific areas that the group under investigation identifies as important within their social environment. For the purpose of this study, Substantive Theory can provide the reader with an explanation of substantive areas, such as the respondents' experiences of education before *access*. Substantive Theory aims to maintain its close links with the empirical data. An example of Substantive Theory is that the respondents experienced poor relations with fellow students whilst at school because their peers had no understanding of dyslexia and its implications within the educational environment.

4:1:2 Grounded Theory and Formal Theory

The next stage in Grounded Theory analysis is to generate a Formal Theory using the comparative method.

The aim of Formal Theory is to provide a more general conceptual interpretation of the data, based on earlier substantive interpretations. An example of Formal Theory would be the ideas about power of the educational system to shape the opportunities available to dyslexics.

The reason why it is important to use Substantive and Formal Theory together is because both theories take into account the micro and macro picture of the social site under investigation.

It is necessary to explore the wider implications of research because it may further explain why the group experienced particular encounters. For example, the respondents' poor experiences at school and College, before they started *access*, could be attributed to a lack of disability awareness within society, which obviously influences the educational environment. The value of Formal Theory is that it therefore locates the work within the structures that exist in society. It is:

...important to be able to go beyond the local setting of the research and to engage with formal ideas at a more general level. (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.141).

Formal Theory provides the context in which to locate the respondents' experiences within and outside the educational environment. Figure 4:1 provides a tool that enabled the researcher to place the respondent experiences in context at a specific and general level. By locating and explaining the respondents' experiences through this particular model, the explanation developed is grounded in the empirical data.

As Formal Theory focuses on the macro issues to emerge from this study it can contribute towards providing a General Theory that will help to explain the

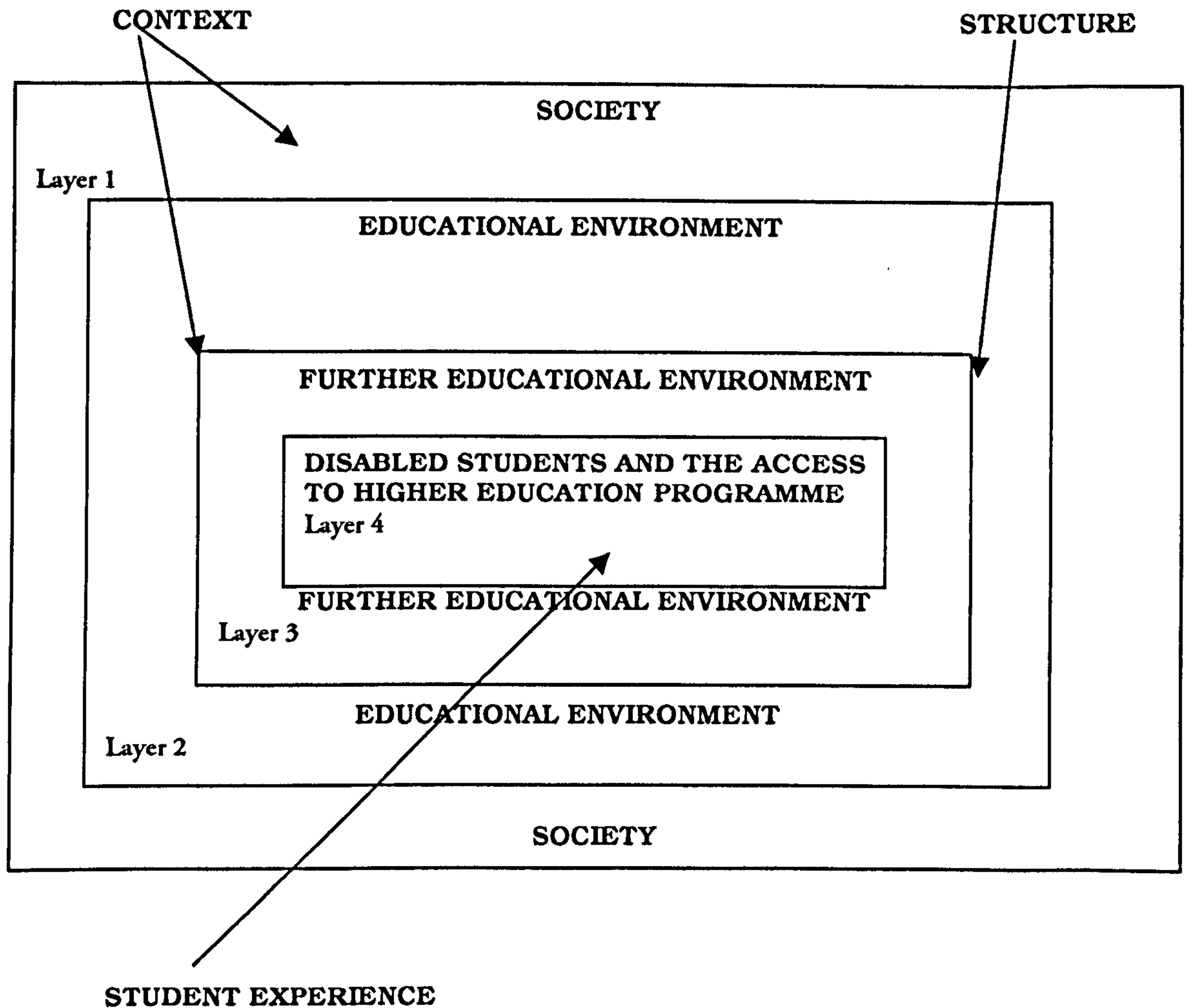
position of disabled people within structures, such as the educational environment, and therefore, within society as a whole.

4:1:3 Grounded Theory and Cumulative Theory

The next stage in Grounded Theory analysis is to link the various Substantive and Formal Theories into what Layder (1982 and 1993) characterises cumulative body of theory. This involved pooling the data which emerged, explaining the respondent experiences of each category with general ideas. The value of linking various theories together is that any overarching theory that emerges has been developed through rigorous analysis.

It is necessary to link the various substantive and formal explanations together, otherwise any recommendations would be limited specifically to the social site of investigation. Therefore, the significance of using Substantive and Formal Theory is that when combined they can highlight specific barriers dyslexic students face within the *access* environment and also locate them within wider society to further our understanding of the position of dyslexics. The Cumulative Theory developed from the respondent experiences of education before *access* category was that there is limited knowledge of dyslexia within society. Cumulative theory is, therefore, a useful tool to identify areas for change within society.

Figure 4:1: The context for the student experience of access



4:1:4 Grounded Theory and the Wider Social World

After developing Cumulative Theory from the various Substantive and Formal Theories to explain the dyslexic student experience, it is necessary to link these particular explanations with existing social theories (Layder, 1993) about society. The importance of linking this study within the wider social world is that it is helping to place this investigation of the *access* environment in context within the wider social world.

It is the purpose of this study to place the dyslexic student experience in context within wider society. This involved comparing the dyslexic student's experience with existing literature on the disabled student experience and *access* programme. The intention of this comparison was to establish whether or not the dyslexic student experience was in common with or different to that of other individuals enrolled on *access*.

By placing the respondents' experience within the context of the developments within the educational sector, such as the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996) and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), it would help to establish whether or not such developments are actually helping disabled students.

By locating the dyslexic student experience within the existing broad educational framework it will allow the researcher to explain the position of this group. This is achieved by digging beneath the reality of the educational environment through exploring the respondents' experiences and matching them with developments to promote access to education. Through these actions the researcher is able to reveal the oppressive barriers dyslexic people face and to provide explanations why this group encounters such oppression.

4:2 Coding of Data

Figure 4:2 shows the various steps of how the data was coded for this study. When coding the data for this study, the researcher drew on the principles of Grounded Theory analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1990) envisage coding as breaking down conceptualising the data and putting it back together in new ways.

It is part of the process that tries to provide an explanation for the data. For example the coding process can explain why some respondents did not discover their dyslexia whilst at school.

Before carrying out the process of coding it is necessary to decide on how the conceptualised data will be labelled, by becoming immersed in the data. The researcher considers how to label the data with category names. There are possibly three options available to the researcher when deciding on category names.

Firstly, use a name that you have already given to the data at the conceptualisation stage. Secondly, take names from the technical literature on the area of study. For example taking a term from the literature on the prior educational experience of dyslexic adults. Thirdly, develop category names from the words and phrases used by the participants themselves “in vivo codes” (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

For this study, the researcher developed “in vivo codes” from the data as the category names for the analysis. The value of using this method to develop category names is that theory can be developed from the substantive area, through a bottom up detailed approach. For example the code “*promised support when he went to college*” is one of the in vivo codes which was developed from Norman’s experience of support at one college of further education before he enrolled on *access* at another college.

The advantage of developing category names through this process is that the researcher can move towards developing higher-level codes. An example of a higher-level code would be “*teachers providing support at school*,” which is part of the “*experiences of support whilst at school and college sub-category*.” Ultimately, in vivo codes were used because any theories that are developed are thus grounded in the empirical reality of the respondents’ experience of education.

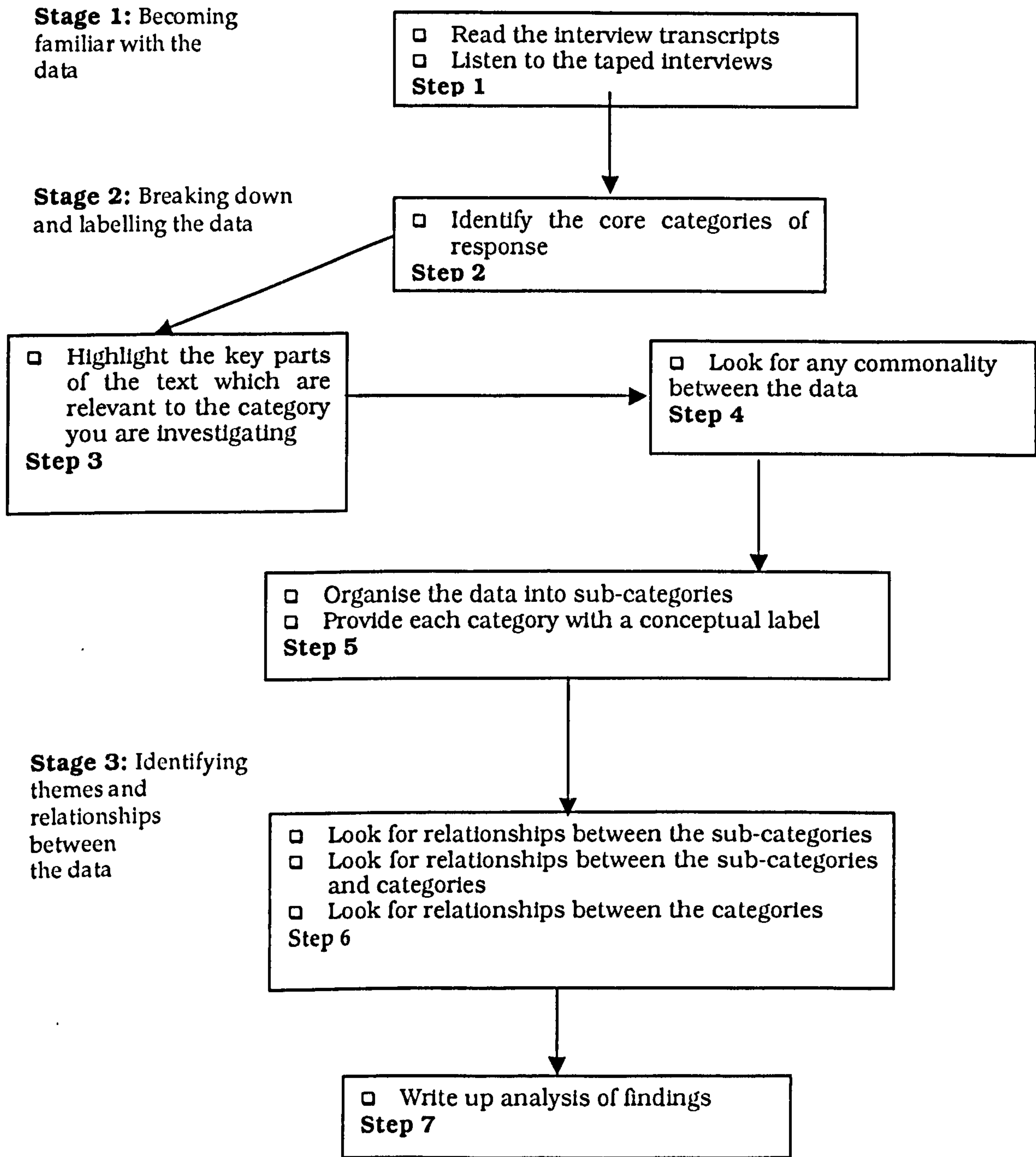
The next stage of Grounded Theory analysis is to search for themes and relationships between the data. This involves identifying:

...patterns and processes, commonalties and differences, (Miles and Huberman, 1994,p.9)

throughout the data. For this research it involved looking for themes or interconnections that recur between the units and categories emerging from the data (Denscombe, 1998) by the constant comparative method.

After making these comparisons it is important to ask the question, what is this data telling us about the respondent experiences of school and college?

Figure 4:2: Displaying the various steps of how the data was categorised along the principles of Grounded Theory



4:3 Computer Assisted Analysis of the Data

Qualitative researchers have turned to information technology because it can assist them in the research process. It provides them with the opportunity to focus on data analysis and to discover theory creatively (Morison and Moir, 1998). However, there are criticisms of using information technology to assist with the analysis of qualitative data. Becker (1993) suggests that computer-aided analysis results in simplified and descriptive results. Another criticism is that it has the potential to alienate the researcher from their data and enforce analytic strategies that are contrary to the methodological and theoretical orientations of qualitative research (Seidel and Kelle, 1995).

A review of this field suggests that there are dedicated software packages such as Nud.ist and Atlas/ti designed to assist with Grounded Theory analysis. Morison and Moir's (1998) use of Nud.ist within their research suggests there are advantages and disadvantages of using the dedicated Grounded Theory packages. The advantage was in:

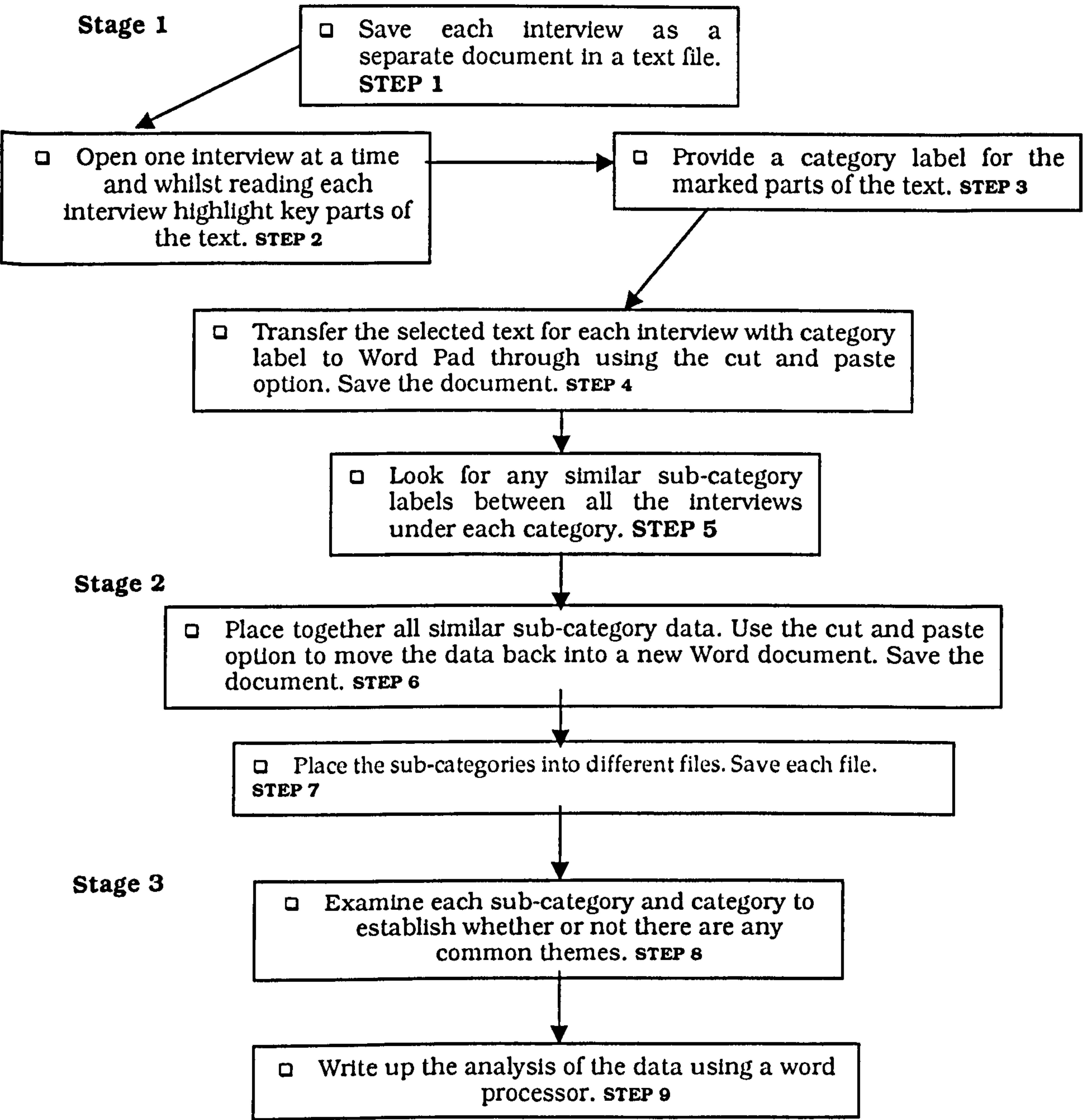
...data storage, searching and retrieval and certain aspects of concept organisation. (Morison and Moir, 1998, p.115).

However, they felt that Nud.ist could not:

...replace those moments of intuition when the relationships between concepts crystallise in the researcher's imagination. (Morison and Moir, 1998, p.115).

Figure 4:3 shows how information technology packages were used to help the researcher with the analysis. Stage one firstly involved organising the data into a more manageable format, such as saving each interview in a text file. Secondly relevant parts of the text in the category under investigation were pulled out and provided with a category label.

Figure 4:3: How information technology was used to assist Grounded Theory analysis



4:4 Design of Research

The investigation of the student experience of *access* was based on the principles of Critical Social Research. The two stages of the research are represented in Figure 4:4. The way in which the study was carried out is represented in Figure 4:5.

The researcher approached the area of *access* routes into higher education with an understanding of some of the issues facing disabled students, but was:

...open to discovering new factors of relevance to an explanation of that area, rather than restricting the scope of the research to whether a hypothesis based on existing theories had got it right (or not). (Denscombe, 1998, p.216).

Whilst analysing the data generated from the investigation of *access*, the researcher drew on the principles of Grounded Theory to guide him through this process.

The aim of the first stage, with a particular focus on deafness and dyslexia, was to establish to what extent disabled students were enrolling on *access* programmes and to explore, at a general level, their experience of this programme. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to investigate the respondent experiences of *access*. The questions were modelled on the student interview schedule developed for the "Disabled Students in Education Project" (Palfreman-Kay and Taylor, 1996) which aimed to establish what was key to respondents' experience of education.

For the first stage of the research fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten dyslexic and four deaf students enrolled on *access* programmes at five colleges of further education which have links with De Montfort University. An analysis of the student experience produced seven key themes.

Figure 4:4

A model detailing the various stages of the experiences of dyslexic adults enrolled on access to higher education programmes

<p>STAGE 1 (YEAR 1)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">START OF STAGE 1 OF THE RESEARCH</p> <p>Desk Based Research Stage 1: contact colleges of further education which are linked with De Montfort University to establish whether they have dyslexic or deaf students enrolled on <i>access</i>.</p> <p>Preparation for Interviewing Stage 1: establish which colleges have such students and ask key staff whether they will ask these individuals if they are prepared to take part in the research.</p> <p>1(a) Stage Staff Interviewing: hold semi-structured interviews with key staff such as <i>access</i>, learning support staff and Disability Co-ordinators to talk about their experiences of disabled students enrolled on this educational programme.</p> <p>1(b) Stage Student Interviewing: hold semi-structured interviews with dyslexic and deaf students to ask about their experiences of <i>access</i>.</p> <p>Preparation for the Next Stage of the Research: establish with key staff whether they are aware of either dyslexic or deaf students enrolling on <i>access</i> for the following academic year. Have a 'back-up' plan if the researcher failed to find enough students for the next academic year. Develop links with the City Literary Institute to find out whether or not dyslexic or deaf students would be prepared to take part in the next stage of the research.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">END OF STAGE 1 OF THE RESEARCH</p>
<p>STAGE 2 (YEAR 2)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">START OF STAGE 2 OF THE RESEARCH</p> <p>Desk Based Research Stage 2: re-contact colleges of further education. Arrange a time to meet the students to allow them to ask questions about the research.</p> <p>2(a) Stage Student Interviewing: hold a conversation with participating students to find out what was important to these individuals being dyslexic and enrolled on <i>access</i>.</p> <p>2(b)-2(h) Stage Student Interviewing: hold a series of semi-structured interviews with students on specific topics identified from previous interviewing on a monthly basis.</p> <p>2(i) Stage Staff Interviewing: hold a series of semi-structured interviews with learning support staff to explore their experience of supporting dyslexic students on <i>access</i>.</p> <p>2(j)-2(n) Stage Staff Questionnaires: develop learning support questionnaires and send them to participating colleges.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">END OF STAGE 2 OF THE RESEARCH</p>
<p>STAGE 3 (YEAR 3)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WRITE UP RESEARCH</p>

These themes were then used as a framework to structure the second stage of the research. To supplement the student interviews nineteen un-structured interviews with key staff such as *access*, Learning Support and Disability Co-ordinators were conducted. The findings and field notes from these interviews were used as a framework to structure the staff interviews undertaken in the next stage of the research.

One of the main findings to emerge from this stage of the research was that a limited number of dyslexic and deaf adults had enrolled on *access* programmes. The researcher decided to have a back-up plan to use if not enough dyslexic and deaf students could be found. The City Literary Institute, London was then approached to establish whether they had experience of dyslexic and deaf students enrolling on their *access* programmes. The reason why this Institute was approached is that it is the place where *access* originated through the Fresh Horizons programme (Kirton, 1999). Through contact with the Institute it was discovered that they mainly had experience of dyslexic students enrolling on their *access* programmes. A group of dyslexic students were identified as willing to take part in the research. However, the back-up plan was not used.

The second stage of the research involved initially making contact again with the colleges of further education that are linked to De Montfort University to determine the number of dyslexic and deaf students actually enrolled on *access*. The responses revealed that dyslexic but not deaf students were enrolling on *access*, which resulted in taking the decision at this stage to focus only on the experiences of dyslexic students. From my contact with the colleges eight dyslexic students agreed to take part in the research.

Two interview schedules were developed to explore the students' experience of *access*. The first interview schedule was a "conversation with a purpose", which

aimed to establish what was important to the respondents about being dyslexic and enrolled on *access*. The findings from these interviews were combined with the first stage interviews, field notes and completed second stage interviews to develop a semi-structured interview schedule for each of the seven themes identified earlier.

At the start of each semi-structured interview the respondents were given the interview schedule and asked if it reflected their experience of the theme under investigation. If they felt it did not, the interview schedule would be adapted accordingly. The aim of the second stage of the research was to allow the respondents to identify what they considered to be important for them in their experience of *access* within the framework of each theme.

For the second stage of the research, a total of fifty-eight interviews were conducted during the academic year 1997-98. The interviews were carried out approximately once a month, at various locations such as the respondent's home, staff offices, Learning Support areas and college refectories. Each interview lasted between half-an-hour and an hour on average.

To supplement the investigation of the student experience of *access*, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with Learning Support staff at the participating colleges. The aim of these interviews was to establish their experience of, and support available to, dyslexic students enrolled on *access*, using a similar process. In total twenty-five questionnaires were sent to key staff at twelve colleges of further education. In total eight questionnaires were returned by the participating colleges.

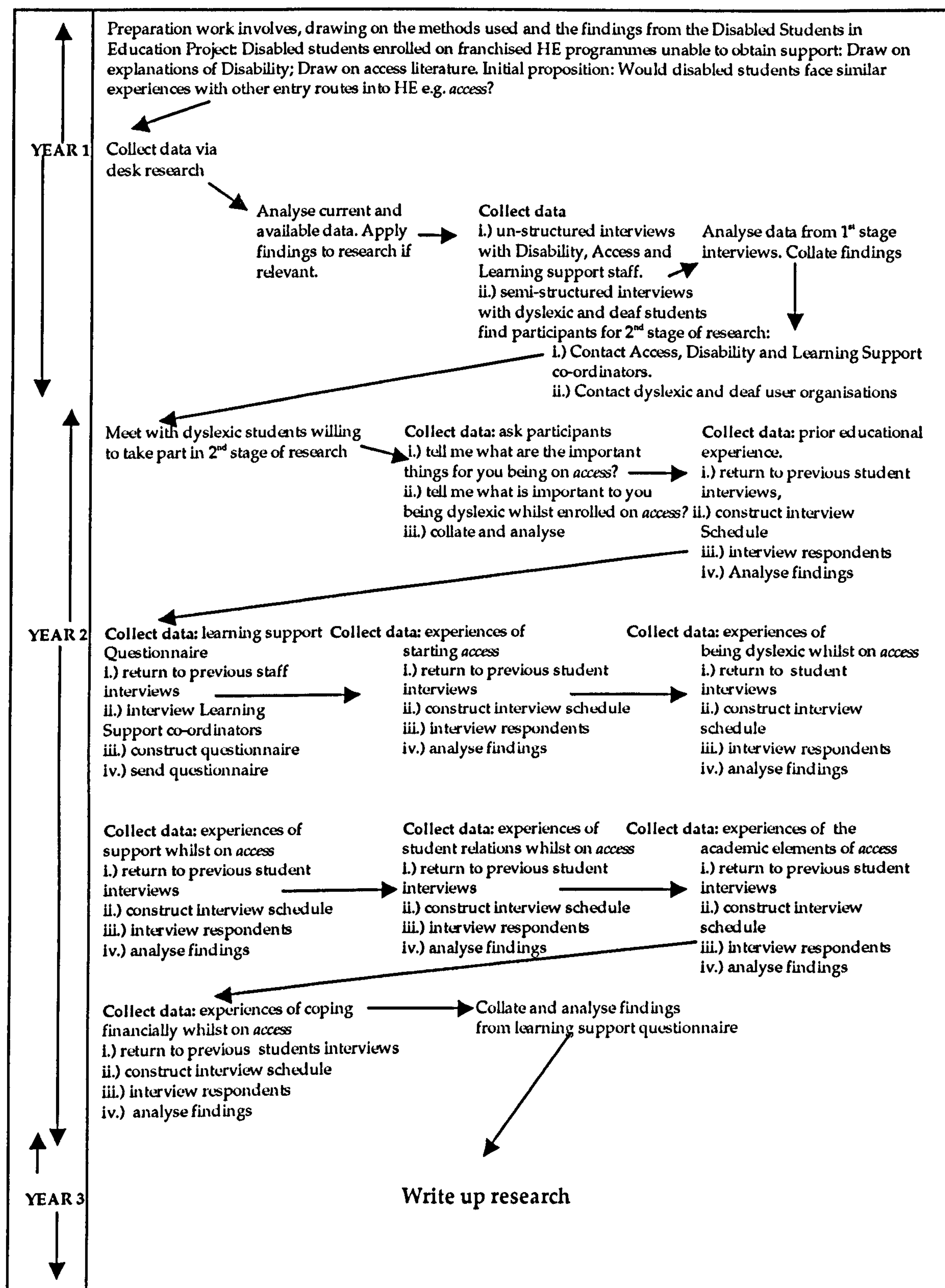
After the data collection was completed the researcher kept in touch with the dyslexic students who took part in the research and has provided advice on how to prepare for the move to university.

The respondents have been shown the data analysis chapters and the Substantive, Formal and Cumulative Theories which emerged, with the intention of establishing whether or not they agreed with the findings. On the whole the respondents mainly agreed with the findings and, in certain instances, were surprised about the similarity in experiences. When the research is completed it is the intention of the researcher to send copies to the students and staff who participated in the study.

Figure 4:5

A Model Detailing the way in which the research was undertaken

This model is based upon the ANALYTIC INDUCTION METHOD derived from Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as applied by Kemshall (1998).



4:5 Research Tools

When undertaking any investigation into social life it is important to make sure that the tools selected correspond with the research approach adopted for the study. With Critical Social Research not being restricted to any one specific method, it is a research approach that can use a range of data collection methods. Recognition of this view comes from Harvey (1990), when he states that methods such as Critical Ethnography:

...make use of the usual ethnographic data collection processes such as in-depth interviewing, semi-structured and unstructured interviewing, and participant observation. (p.12).

4:5:1 Methods of Interviewing

Interviewing techniques have mainly been adopted to explore the student experience because the:

...interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences.(Kvale, 1996, p.1).

Interviews are flexible techniques which are able to deal with a variety of subject material at different levels of detail or complexity (Bremmer et al, 1985). To supplement the various interviewing techniques questionnaires, were used to further explore the staff experiences of supporting disabled students. These methods were used during stages one and two of the interviewing, following a bottom up approach (Holman, 1987) that allowed the respondents to guide the research process.

Semi-structured and un-structured interviewing techniques were used together. The aim of semi-structured interviewing is to obtain descriptions of the world of the interviewee (Kvale, 1996), but the interviewer is free to alter their sequence and

to probe for more information (Fielding, 1995). The value of semi-structured interviewing is that it allows:

...people to answer more on their own terms than the standardised interview permits, but still provide a greater structure for comparability over that of the focused interview. (May, 1997, p. 111).

The advantage of this form of interviewing is that it is allowing the individual to tell their point of view, therefore, following a bottom-up approach because it still allows the respondent to guide the research process.

The interview questions listed in Appendix Stage 1(a) were developed from the Programme Leader interview schedule used for the "Disabled Students in Education Project" (Palfreman-Kay and Taylor, 1996). The intention of these questions was to gain entry into the *access* environment. These interviews were undertaken during the first half of 1996. At the start of the academic year 1997-98 the researcher got in touch with the contacts he had made during the first stage of the research to establish whether new dyslexic or deaf students were enrolling on *access* who might be willing to participate.

The stage one interview schedule was based on previous interviews investigating the student experience through the Disabled Students in Education Project (Palfreman-Kay and Taylor, 1996). The questions asked are listed in Appendix Stage 1(b). The data generated from these interviews was used to develop the student questions asked during the second stage of the research.

The structure for the student interviews was based on the analysis of previous student interviews carried out during stage one and two of the research. The analysis produced the following seven themes as important to the dyslexic and deaf students who took part in stage one and the early part of stage two. The key themes were:

- ❑ Experiences of education before *access*
- ❑ Experiences of starting *access*
- ❑ Experiences of being dyslexic whilst on *access*
- ❑ Experiences of support whilst on *access*
- ❑ Experiences of student relationships whilst on *access*
- ❑ Experiences of coping academically whilst on *access*
- ❑ Experiences of coping financially whilst on *access*

The questions for each semi-structured interview on each of these topics were developed from the various student interview transcripts and are listed in Appendices Stage 2(b)-2(h). A series of prompts was also included within each interview schedule to help the researcher. The intention here was to allow the respondents to identify what was of importance particularly to them within each of the seven areas, which could then be explored in-depth. Through constantly re-visiting the data the researcher was trying to develop questions that followed a bottom-up approach (Holman, 1987). As before, at each interview the respondents were shown the interview schedule to establish whether or not the questions being asked were an accurate representation of the theme being explored. On the whole the respondents agreed with the questions being asked, apart from a few minor changes. These interviews were carried out between December 1997 and June 1998.

The questions for the Staff Semi-Structured interviews are listed in Appendix, Stage 2(i). The aim of using this method of data collection was to establish what was in place to support dyslexic students enrolled on *access* at their specific college. The questionnaire aimed to establish whether this support was in place and really being used by the respondents. These interviews were carried out between January and March 1998.

Un-structured interviews were also used, for initial exploration during stage two of the student and staff experience of *access*. This form of interviewing, alternatively known as informal or unstandardised interviews, is different to structured and semi-structured interviewing because of its open-ended character. The value of this approach is that it has:

...the ability to challenge the preconceptions of the researcher, as well as to enable the interviewee to answer questions within their own frame of reference. (May, 1997, p.112).

This interviewing method, which can be described as a conversation with a purpose (Burgess 1990), is ideally suited for the preliminary stages of a research project. It is a method of data collection that provides researchers with the opportunity to establish a picture of the social site they are investigating. One concern about using this technique is that an interviewee can simply talk about an issue in any way they choose. However Bryman (1988a) points to the advantage of this approach because:

...a phenomenon like rambling can be viewed as providing information, because it reveals something about the interviewee's concerns. Unstructured interviewing qualitative research, then, departs from survey interviewing not only in terms of format, but also in terms of its concern for the perspective of those being interviewed. (Bryman, 1988a, p.47).

The aim of using un-structured interviewing during the second stage was to discover what was important to the dyslexic participants. It was also used to help the respondents develop a feeling of trust and provide them with the freedom to identify issues. After a preliminary meeting, a further time was arranged to have a conversation with the respondents about what was important to them about being dyslexic and being enrolled on *access*. The two questions are listed in Appendix Stage 2(a). These interviews occurred during November 1997. The intention of asking these questions was to enable the respondent to guide the research process.

4:5:2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to further explore learning support staff experiences of supporting this group within the *access* environment. The aim of a questionnaire as a method of data collection is to gather specific information from the social site that is being investigated. However, where they differ from interviewing methods adopted for this study is that they are asking more specific questions. Denscombe (1998) states:

...questionnaires work on the premise that if you want to find out something about people and their attitudes you simply go and ask them what it is you want to know, and get information 'straight from the horse's mouth.' (p.88).

Questionnaires are an ideal research tool when the researcher is looking to gather facts or opinions about the social site that is being investigated. Denscombe (1998) defines factual information being the participants revealing:

...(accurately and honestly) information: their address, age, sex, martial status, number of children etc. (p.89).

He also goes on to define opinions, which in this case are the respondents revealing:

...information about feelings, to express values, to weigh up alternatives etc., in a way that calls for a judgement about things rather than the mere reporting of facts. (p.89).

In trying to achieve insight the researcher has to consider what type of questions to ask. May (1997) suggests consideration of whether to use open or closed questions, or a combination of both. Open questions provide the respondents with an opportunity to answer the questions in a way that suits the individual. Whilst

closed questions restrict the number of answers the participant can provide. May (1997) states:

...data collection in surveys is conducted mainly through three types of questionnaires: the mail or self-completion questionnaire; the telephone survey and the face-to face interview schedule.(p.89).

The type of questionnaire selected depends on the target audience and the nature of the research and the resources available.

Mail or self-completion questionnaires were used within this study to collect contextual data, with the aim of establishing whether the support, which staff identified as available to these students, was actually in place. The questionnaires sent are available in Appendix Stage 2(j)-2(n). Collecting this information intended to reveal barriers in place that may be preventing dyslexic students from having a successful experience of the educational environment. A mixture of open and closed questions, which were used from the previous semi-structured interviews, were developed to gain a range of factual material and the opinions of key staff. In order to obtain the most accurate representation of the support provision available the questionnaires were sent to learning support staff as well as *access* and Disability Co-ordinators. These questionnaires were sent during March 1998.

4:5:3 Validity & Reliability

When conducting qualitative research it is important to establish whether or not the research:

...accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers. (Hammersley, 1990, p.57).

It is, therefore, necessary to consider how far this investigation represents the experiences of dyslexic adults enrolled on *access* programmes at the colleges of further education which have links with De Montfort University.

4:5:3:1 Validity & Reliability and Critical Social Research

To establish whether this study of the dyslexic student experience is representative it is necessary to establish how Critical Social Research deals with the issue of validity and reliability. Critical Social Research adopts the view that:

...data are meaningful only in terms of their theoretical context, reliability and validity are functions of the context and the epistemological presuppositions that the researcher brings to the enquiry. So, for critical social research, data are important in order to ground the enquiry but data must not be treated as independent of their socio-historic context. (Harvey, 1990, p.8).

Validity and reliability for critical social research, therefore, involve locating these data on the dyslexic student experience in the context of developments within the English educational environment during the period 1996-1999. This involved the researcher recognising his own beliefs about the educational environment and whether the results of this specific investigation of *access* are characteristic of the dyslexic student experience.

It is necessary for the researcher to recognise his epistemological presuppositions about the educational environment. The belief that the researcher brought with him to the investigation was that the educational environment is oppressive a, belief grounded in his own personal experiences as a dyslexic student. The motivation for this research was, therefore, to improve the position of dyslexic students within the educational environment. The researcher's openness about his dyslexia also made an important contribution to the research. It was felt this openness encouraged the individuals to come forward and take part in the research. The respondents felt that the researcher would actually understand what it was like to be dyslexic whilst studying. Through working closely with the respondents, the researcher felt that these individuals spoke freely about their own

experiences of *access*, which helped to provide an important insight into the educational environment.

The next requirement of critical social research, when tacking validity and reliability, is to establish whether this study is a typical example of the English educational environment. Placing this investigation of dyslexic students' experience in context, it clearly fits with the wider experience of adult education described in the literature review. One example from the second stage of the research, which supports this claim, was the finding that the respondent experienced positive relationships with fellow disabled students. Simon remembered how he and another dyslexic student helped each other out during their course.

We helped each other as much as possible. He has asked me for advice on his work and I would do the same thing. He would also ask me advice on getting a place at University. We would just help each other out as much as possible. (Simon)

Dale and Green (1998) reinforced this view, in their work with visually impaired students, when they discovered that individuals from this group felt more at ease with each other because they:

...are in the same boat and know how to help one another. (Dale and Green, 1998, p.10).

This similarity between experiences suggests that when disabled students come together a common bond develops because these individuals have had similar past experiences, and are able to identify with each other.

Further similarities between respondents' experiences and the wider literature on the adult educational experience reflect both groups recalling similar negative experiences of school and college before *access*. Jane recalled her negative

experience of school, remembering how her teachers displayed little knowledge of dyslexia.

It was embarrassing to sit in front of your teacher and for her to explain where you had gone wrong. Basically my work was chucked back at me and I was told to do it again. Instead of recognising dyslexia my teachers just thought I was stupid. (Jane)

McFadden's (1995) research reinforces this view.

In the junior school, I was told that I would never get anywhere ... and I mean, that's still affecting me now, you know what I mean? And it takes a time for you to realise that it's only a stupid teacher. Merton (p.49).

Through highlighting the similarity between the dyslexic student experience and current literature, it suggests that one of the reasons why individuals return to education through educational programmes such as *access* is because they have had prior negative experiences of this environment. As stated by Brennan (1988):

[The aim of access is]...to make Higher Education available to people who for whatever reason, could not make use of conventional routes and provision ... [such as school and College]. (p.25).

Having provided some examples to illustrate how this investigation of the dyslexic student experience fits within the English educational environment, it is possible to suggest that this investigation of dyslexic students' experience is a valid picture of this group.

Having established how Critical Social Research tackles the issues of validity and reliability it is necessary to see how Critical Ethnography and Grounded Theory, which operated within this approach, were used to establish a valid and reliable picture of *access*. Critical Ethnography tackles the issue of validity and reliability through a process of critical reflection. Critical reflection is achieved through the researcher asking two questions.

The first is, what is the truth quotient of the study? Here, we examine how own values and ideology influence our work, whether we might inadvertently have excluded counterexamples that would subvert our analysis, and how our study might be different if we could redo it. The second question examines the social implications of our findings and how we present them. In this phase, we ask how our study challenges injustice and what the implications for action are. (Thomas, 1993, p.47).

In answering the first question, the researcher needs to consider how far he influenced the investigation of the *access* environment. It needs to be acknowledged that the researcher influenced the study. This occurred through the researcher being a dyslexic person, which allowed him to identify with respondents' experiences of school and college. The researcher also influenced the data through the research approach, methods and tools of data collection selected to explore the *access* environment. Whilst aiming to allow the respondents to speak freely about their educational experiences, the researcher's commitment to improve the position of dyslexic students within the educational clearly influenced the data.

It is now necessary to consider whether this study would be designed differently, if given another opportunity. This would involve considering whether the researcher would have gained entry to the *access* environment through a different research approach and method, as well as methods of data collection.

Before considering whether or not a different research approach, method and tools of data collection could have been used, it is important to consider whether alternative entry to the *access* environment could have been gained. It would have been difficult to undertake the research in any other way without the help of key staff such as *Access* and Disability Co-ordinators, as well as learning support staff as the support of these individuals was needed to gain entry to the *access* environment. The permission of these individuals was also needed to gain entry to

each participating college and, as has already been shown, the researcher's contact with external dyslexia organisations did not prove as successful as initially hoped in putting the researcher in contact with dyslexic adults. Without the support of these individuals the likelihood of the research being successful would have been poor.

In establishing that the research could not have been undertaken without the support of key staff, it is now necessary to consider whether the investigation of the dyslexic student experience could have occurred through a different research approach and method, as well as tools of data collection.

Critical Social Research was the approach that the investigation of *access* was located in because of the commitment towards providing:

...knowledge, which engages the prevailing social structures. Critical researchers, in one way or another, see these social structures as oppressive social structures. (Harvey, 1990, p.2).

This research approach fits with the commitment behind the study. It provides the framework to improve the position of dyslexic students, through revealing the oppression this group faces. In contrast, other research approaches, such as Symbolic Interactionism do not fit with the commitment behind the investigation because it is a research approach which focuses on exploring the dynamic social activities taking place between individuals.

The problem with using any other research approach, apart from Critical Social Research, is that they are not committed to revealing the oppression dyslexic students face within *access*, which in turn intends to improve their position within the educational environment.

The next step in addressing the issues of validity and reliability for Critical Ethnography is to consider whether a different research method could have been

used to explore dyslexic students' experiences. A Critical Ethnographic method was adopted to explore the student experience because of its commitment towards negating:

...the repressive influences that lead to unnecessary social domination of all groups. (Thomas, 1993, p.4).

Critical Ethnography is, therefore, a method that helps to challenge the oppression specific groups face within society. In contrast, to other research methods such as Ethnography which is:

...a research process in which the anthropologist closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture-an experience labelled as the fieldwork method-and then writes accounts of this culture, emphasizing descriptive detail.(Marcus and Fischer, 1986, p.18).

Ethnography is, therefore, a research method that aims to describe the culture it is aiming to investigate. The emphasis on description can, therefore, play an important role in describing the position of dyslexic students with the *access* environment. Again, it is the commitment behind the study, towards improving the position of dyslexic students, which makes Ethnography an inappropriate method to undertake the investigation of *access*.

It is also necessary to consider whether any other methods of data collection could have been used to explore dyslexic students' experiences. It was felt that structured interviewing and questionnaires would hamper individual students being able to talk about their own experiences of *access*, as well as preventing the respondents from guiding the research process, by imposing an inflexible structure on the investigation of their experiences. It was the commitment towards flexibility that resulted in un-structured and semi-structured interviews being used to explore dyslexic students' experience. The emphasis on flexibility is shown with the

researcher having a conversation with the dyslexic respondents, at the start of stage two of the research with the purpose of finding out what was important to them about being dyslexic and enrolled on *access*.

However, it does need to be considered whether or not the respondents were telling the researcher “what he wanted to hear” when the interview questions were asked. On the whole, the respondents probably provided an accurate picture of each interview topic, which was highlighted through the respondents recalling similar experiences through the different interview schedules. When the researcher became immersed in the data it was noticeable that key themes emerged, such as the importance of educational experiences before *access*. Furthermore, when comparing the responses between the respondents, they were highlighting similar themes such as poor educational experience before *access* and variation in the knowledge of dyslexia suggesting that an accurate picture was being displayed.

Turning to the second question in the process of critical reflection, how does this research improve the position of dyslexic people? Has the research helped the dyslexic participants directly? On the whole, the research probably helped to improve the position of these dyslexic students who took part in the study. It helped the respondents to develop a greater understanding of their disability. Furthermore, the researcher improved the position of the dyslexic students who took part in the study by helping to prepare them for a move to University. This was done through making the students aware of the grants such as the DSA, the support offered to dyslexics and the impact of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995).

It was probably the researcher helping the respondents to develop a greater understanding of their dyslexia which had the greatest significant impact on improving the position of this group of students individually and as a whole. This

is because the respondents were able to display a much more positive picture of their dyslexia to lecturers whilst on *access* and at university, as well as to their partners, family and friends. This approach has helped to challenge negative attitudes and raise greater awareness of dyslexia through these individuals passing on the knowledge that they have gained about their disability to others: which in turn has the potential to create a more inclusive society. The position of dyslexic people in general would, therefore, be improved over time.

When considering how the research has improved the position of dyslexic students, as a whole, it is necessary to consider whether this investigation has influenced the institutional provision for this group. At this stage it is difficult to assess whether or not this study has helped to improve this as already mentioned, when the research is written up and completed, it is the intention of the researcher to send copies to the students and staff who participated in the study. One immediate success at an institutional level was that the study raised the profile of the position of disabled students, in particular dyslexics, within the *access* environment.

Taking into consideration that it may not be possible to return to the participating colleges, the researcher intends to disseminate the findings from the study at every stage possible, through conferences and publications such as a conference at the University of Central Lancashire (Palfreman-Kay, 1998). However, the problem with attending this conference was that no one attended the presentation. Explanations for the lack of attendance were that there is little interest in the needs of disabled students within higher education or that there were more interesting presentations at the same time. However, the researcher reported on the prior educational experiences of the respondents before *access* at a conference at Huddersfield University during July 2000. The researcher has also had recently published an article in the Journal of Further and Higher Education (Palfreman-

Kay and Taylor, 2000) which focused on the dyslexic experiences of relationships with their fellow *access* students. This helps to raise the profile of dyslexic students with educational providers. Promoting the needs of dyslexic students at this level should increase the chances of further and higher education becoming more accessible for this group of students.

For wider dissemination the researcher has used electronic mailbases such as “dis-forum,” “dyslexia,” “dis-he policy” and “disability research.” These mailbases covered a range of topics such as legislation within higher and further education and the support available to dyslexics. Dissemination of the research was achieved through making contact with individuals who work within the field of disability and in further, as well as higher education, when seeking help with the research. After writing up the study the researcher intends to publicise the findings through these mailbases and to place such work on the internet.

To embed the investigation of the *access* environment at a grass roots level, the researcher has also disseminated his work through local disability organisations such as the Leicestershire Centre for Integrated Living (LCIL). After the research has been completed, it is the intention to give a copy of the investigation of the *access* environment to LCIL. There is also the intention to provide the study to National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (Skill), which is an organisation that represents the needs of disabled students in education. The research is also to be provided to another disability organisation, Disability Equality in Education (DEE), with the intention of helping to inform the training that they provide within schools and colleges. Furthermore the research is to be provided to the Government Office for the East Midlands, with the aim of assisting their social inclusion team to develop social inclusion indicators for the educational environment.

4:5:3:2 Validity & Reliability and Grounded Theory

By establishing how Critical Ethnography tackles the issues of validity and reliability through a process of critical reflection, it is now necessary to establish how Grounded Theory deals with this issue. Grounded Theory tackles the issues of validity through requiring the researcher, who develops a Grounded Theory or theories, to ensure they have a commonsense fit and relevance (Layder, 1993). This involves developing an explanation that:

...must be 'accessible' to the people in the study, in the sense that it describes some aspects of their everyday experience which they recognise and understand. (Layder, 1993. p.65).

For Grounded Theory explanations to be valid the participants must be able to understand and identify them as a representation of their experience. Therefore respondents would have to agree with the Grounded Theories developed to explain their experience of *access*, whether it is starting *access* or being dyslexic whilst enrolled on this educational programme. To establish whether the explanations were valid representations the respondents were shown the various explanations with which, on the whole, they agreed.

When undertaking the data analysis the rigorous approach of Grounded Theory producing either a theory or theories was followed. This involved the researcher continually reading the interview transcripts to become immersed in the data, to search for codes which could then be grouped together to develop sub-categories and categories that would be able to explain the student experience. Through this process the theories that emerged were being constantly being refined. To check whether the theories produced reflected the student experience the researcher showed the respondents the various explanations which they agreed were an accurate representation of their encounters whilst on *access*.

After establishing how Grounded Theory tackles the issue of validity, it is now

necessary to establish how this method deals with reliability. Chentiz and Swanson (1986) suggest one way to test reliability is through replication. This would involve another dyslexic researcher undertaking an investigation of this group's educational experience enrolled on *access*. However, Chentiz and Swanson (1986) recognise that it would be difficult to replicate a study which uses Grounded Theory because the analysis is partially based on:

...the researcher's best analysis which includes the researcher's skill, creativity, time, resources, and analytic ability, no two analyses will be exactly alike, since no two researchers are exactly alike. (Chentiz and Swanson, 1986, p13).

Applying reliability to a Grounded Theory study, therefore, involves a researcher considering the following - 'if [they] applied the theories generated from the study of the *access* environment, will it work if applied to a similar situation, and allow the researcher to interpret, understand, and predict the dyslexic students' experiences?' (Chentiz and Swanson, 1986). Establishing reliability for this investigation of dyslexic students' experience would involve other researchers taking the theories generated from the investigation of the *access* environment to other contexts, such as the encounters of similar students within higher education. In recognising that other researchers may not ever test out the theories generated from the investigation of the *access* environment, it is important to have some indicators in place which would suggest that the theories generated from the investigation of the *access* environment provide a reliable insight. This goal was achieved through comparing such explanations with existing research noted in the literature review, such as the work of Palfreman-Kay (1998), which on the whole confirmed that they were a reliable insight into dyslexic students' experiences.

4:5:3:3 Validity & Reliability and Transcription

By considering whether the methods adopted have accurately represented the students experience it is also necessary to consider how the transcription has

influenced the validity and reliability of the data. The researcher transcribed the interview tapes during the first stage but paid someone else to undertake this task during the second stage of the research. During the first stage of the study the researcher found the period of transcription very time consuming, taking between three and seven hours to transcribe each of the interviews. Because a larger number of interviews were planned for the second stage it was felt that the researcher would get bogged down transcribing if he undertook the task himself. Critics of this approach may question how the researcher would become immersed in the data if he was not carrying out the transcription himself. The researcher overcame the hurdle of familiarity through constantly reading interview transcripts to help him prepare for each interview schedule. He would also listen to each interview after they had been completed and make field notes to help him to get close to the data.

When it came to including interview text within the thesis it needs to be noted that the researcher had, at times, either corrected or glossed over the text. These actions were attributed to poor recording environments and bad transcription. When talking with the respondents some of the environments were better than others to investigate the student and staff experience. Where the researcher could he would try to arrange a quiet venue to hold the interview, producing a clear interview recording. However, when it was not possible to find such a room the quality of interview transcripts was mixed, which at times resulted in the researcher correcting or glossing the text. It was also noticeable that once the interview transcripts were passed on to the researcher some of the texts were poorly transcribed. This resulted in the researcher correcting the text to make sense of what the respondents were saying. One explanation for the poorly produced interview transcripts was that the person who the researcher paid to undertake the transcription was overwhelmed by the task.

The criticism of correcting or glossing over the text is that the meaning of the interview transcripts could be altered which would lead to a misrepresentation of the student and staff experience. To overcome this problem the researcher showed the students samples of the corrected and glossed over text to see whether they agreed with the changed material as an accurate representation of their experiences. On the whole the dyslexic respondents felt the various interview texts represented their experiences of *access*.

Taking into consideration the theoretical and methodological checks in place, when dealing with the issue of validity and reliability, it is evident that this study is, as far as possible, a representative insight into the dyslexic student experience of *access*.

4:5:4 Triangulation

Triangulation is a research strategy that involves using several methods to reveal multiple aspects of a single empirical reality (Denzin, 1978). An assumption of triangulation:

...is that sociological research is a discovery process designed to get an objective truth. (Silverman, 1997, p.25).

Denzin (1989) states that there are two types of triangulation - inter-method triangulation and intra-method triangulation. The former includes two or more methods of different methodological origin and nature whereas the latter uses two or more techniques of the same method.

The appeal of triangulation is that it provides a greater chance of the researcher building up a representative picture of the social site under investigation than would be the case if single methods of data collection were used. Sarantakos (1998) suggests the advantages of using triangulation for a researcher are that it would allow them:

1. to obtain a variety of information on the same issue;
 2. to use the strengths of each method to overcome the deficiencies of the other;
 3. to achieve a higher degree of validity and reliability; and
 4. to overcome the deficiencies of single-method studies.
- (p.169).

Other support for triangulation comes from the feminist perspective, which views it as a:

...commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended and to take risks...[as well as to]...increase the likelihood of obtaining scientific credibility and research utility. (Reinharz, 1992, p.197).

The intention of triangulation is therefore to help the researcher to build up the most accurate and reliable picture of the social site under investigation.

However, there is an alternative school of thought that feels there are disadvantages in using triangulation within the research process. Sarantakos (1998) highlights some of the concerns when he states:

...there is no evidence to suggest that studies based on triangulation necessarily produce more valid results. Even if all diverse methods support each other's finding, all findings might be invalid. In simple terms, the findings of a study based on several methods are not necessarily 'better' than the findings of a single-method study. (Sarantakos, 1998, p.155).

It is probably only after a period of reflection that a researcher would be able to assess whether single or multiple methods helped to produce a valid representation of the social site under investigation.

The main reason for using triangulation within this study was that it was viewed as part of the qualitative research process (Denzin, 1998). The intention in using triangulation was to build up a representative and detailed picture of dyslexic students' experiences of *access*. To elucidate the student and staff experience, the

intra-method form of triangulation was used. This was achieved through using different forms of interviewing, such as un-structured and semi-structured interviews within a Critical Ethnographic method, as well as questionnaires at different stages of the research to progressively build up a detailed picture of the *access* environment. The intention behind using this form of triangulation was, therefore, to secure an in-depth understanding of dyslexic students' experiences.

4:5:5 Sampling

When undertaking social research sampling enables a researcher:

...to draw a sample that will allow the researcher to generalise about the population as a whole. (Fulcher and Scott, 1999, p.82).

This part of the research process, therefore, helps the researcher to make general statements about the position of dyslexic students within the *access* environment. Fulcher and Scott (1999) state that:

...there are two types of sampling: probability sampling (where the mathematical properties of the population are known) and non-probability sampling (where these mathematical properties are unknown.) (p.83).

Probability sampling, such as simple random or systematic random, is based on whether it is possible to calculate the probabilities involved. This would involve being able to determine the number of dyslexic students enrolled on *access* programmes at colleges of further education. In contrast, non-probability sampling such as convenience or snowball sampling is possible when a researcher is unable to calculate the probabilities involved within the research.

The only way to establish whether dyslexic and deaf students were enrolling on *access* programmes at the colleges linked with De Montfort University was for the researcher to contact key staff such as *Access* and Disability Co-ordinators, as well

as learning support staff at these institutions. The researcher mainly used the contacts that he had made previously through the Disabled Students in Education project (Palfreman-Kay and Taylor, 1996). The reason why staff were approached is because of the awareness of the sensitive nature of discovering and being aware of dyslexia and it was also felt that key staff would help students to take part in the research if they were unsure. The preliminary conversations with these key staff suggested that they had limited, or no, experience of disabled students on their *access* programmes. The researcher was, therefore, concerned that he would not find enough dyslexic and deaf students to take part in the study. Some of the explanations given for this low number of disabled students were poor prior educational experiences of adults that put them off of returning to study, or that there was little support available at the selected college to meet student's needs. However, it was noticeable from the staff experience of disabled students as a whole that mainly dyslexic students were enrolling on *access*. After taking the staff experience into consideration, the researcher was aware that he would probably not find any deaf students and was more likely to find a low number of dyslexic students enrolled on *access* programmes.

Bearing in mind that the researcher was looking for specific students to interview, but was unsure whether or not he would find any dyslexic or deaf students to interview, a non-probability sampling approach was selected. Purposive sampling was the specific method of non-probability sampling used for this research. It is a method where:

...a selection of those to be surveyed is made according to a known characteristic. (May, 1997, p.88).

A researcher would therefore look for characteristics relevant to the research such as dyslexic and deaf students and to invite them to take part in the investigation of the *access* environment. This specific method is appropriate for researchers, who

expect that they will discover low numbers within their investigation of social life (May 1997).

By showing what method of sampling was used to find dyslexic and deaf students to take part in the research, it is necessary to show how this goal was achieved. For the first stage of this study the researcher undertook fourteen semi-structured interviews with dyslexic and deaf students. One important factor to emerge from this part of the research was that more dyslexic instead of deaf students were interviewed. It was because of the concern that the researcher would not be able to discover an equal number of dyslexic and deaf students the decision was taken to solely focus on the experiences of dyslexic students for the next stage of the research. After stage one of the research was completed the researcher asked key staff whether they would be prepared to put him in contact with dyslexic students enrolling on *access* programmes for the following academic year. A further noticeable characteristic to emerge from both stages of the research was that there was a limited number of students from ethnic minority groups.

When re-contacting the colleges before the start of the academic year 1997-98, eight dyslexic students were identified as willing to take part in the research. These individuals were enrolled on *access* programmes at five colleges of further education, which have links with De Montfort University. The names of the interviewees and colleges are fictional.

- Tom: Tom was a white, 25-year-old male enrolled on an *access* programme at College A.
- Jane: Jane was a white, 24-year-old female enrolled on an *access* programme at College A.
- James: James was a white, 26-year-old male enrolled on an *access* programme at College B.

- ❑ Jenny: Jenny was a white, 35-year-old female enrolled on an *access* programme at College B.
- ❑ Daniel: Daniel was a white, 29-year-old male enrolled on an *access* programme at College C.
- ❑ Norman: Norman was a white, 21-year-old male enrolled on an *access* programme at College D.
- ❑ Simon: Simon was a white, 50-year-old male enrolled on an *access* programme at College E.
- ❑ Jennet: Jennet was black, 28-year-old female enrolled on an *access* programme at College E. Dropped out of the study after the prior educational experience interview because of family bereavement.

To supplement the main focus of the research, four learning support tutors were also prepared to share their experiences. In fact the number of dyslexic students taking part in the second stage dropped to seven, shortly after the interviews commenced because one of the respondents experienced a family bereavement and withdrew from her *access* programme.

In establishing how purposive sampling was used to find dyslexic and deaf students to take part in the investigation of the *access* environment, it is necessary to establish the strengths and weaknesses of this method of sampling. The strength of purposive sampling for this study was two-fold. Firstly, purposive sampling allowed the researcher to search for the specific phenomena he was wishing to explore, such as the dyslexic student experience of *access*. Secondly, this method of sampling allowed the researcher to work with small numbers within the environment under investigation. The significance of purposive sampling allowing the researcher to work with low numbers is that it recognises that in some research studies it may not be possible to identify a large number of participants to take part in an investigation of social life. This was the case with this investigation into the *access* environment where some dyslexic students declined to take part because

of their work commitments and objections to being classed as disabled. The researcher's contact with local dyslexia and deaf disability organisations and other educational institutions suggest that he also tried to gain the widest sample possible of dyslexic students. Through contact with local disability organisations the researcher hoped these groups would be aware of dyslexic and deaf students enrolled on *access* programmes at the selected colleges and would, therefore, be prepared to put him in touch with such individuals. However, with these organisations not being aware of such students, it again suggested that the researcher could not have gained a larger sample. Furthermore, the researcher's back-up plan only produced three dyslexic students willing to take part in the research, suggesting that the overall number of students recruited was the largest number that could be obtained. Previous research, which has worked in a similar vein, and undertakes research with low numbers, is Weiler's (1998) investigation of the experiences of seven teachers and four administrators in her analysis of school and teaching. Further support for the ability to undertake research with low numbers comes from the work of Knox et al (2000). This particular piece of disability research investigated the experiences of six individuals with an intellectual disability:

...to develop a Grounded Theory explaining the process by which these informants manage their relationships within their personal communities. (Knox et al, 2000, p.49).

These two examples suggest that it is possible to undertake research with a small number of participants.

However, it is also important to recognise the weaknesses in using purposive sampling. One of the major weaknesses of this form of sampling is that it may not help to create a representative insight into the picture of the position of dyslexic people within the educational environment. If this is accepted as a valid concern, it

suggests that working with low numbers is not possible, which means that certain areas of social life cannot be researched, such as the *access* environment. Whilst recognising the weaknesses of purposive sampling, the advantage of using this form of non-probability sampling for this investigation of the *access* environment is that it has allowed the researcher to focus specifically on dyslexic students, experiences, therefore to draw out the richness and diversity of their experience.

Chapter 5 “School was horrible and I hated it, but coming to college was completely different.”

Experiences of education before access

5:1 Dyslexia whilst at school and college

When exploring the respondent experiences of dyslexia whilst at school and college they talked about a range of encounters.

5:1:1 Personal discovery of dyslexia

One of the findings to emerge was the respondents’ experience of discovering that they were dyslexic. Norman talked about discovering his dyslexia by chance through reading his brother’s Educational Psychologist’s report.

I was going through his report, and I was going, ‘that’s like me!’ My mum just went [Norman] ‘I hope its not you as well because you got all this way and there is nothing we have done.’ I took the test and I was. (Norman)

Daniel also recalled personal discovery of dyslexia.

I was always aware I think from perhaps my early teens that I was perhaps dyslexic. This was from the little I knew about it and I was certainly aware I had a learning disability, like dyslexia. (Daniel)

Discovery of dyslexia occurs through the respondents being aware of their difficulties and searching for an explanation of why they are different to their peers. Often it is through luck, or chance encounters - possibly hearing references to dyslexia -that results in their disability being discovered. This is possibly through the media, teachers, friends or parents.

The time taken to discover dyslexia also emerged as an important issue. This is because dyslexia seems to be discovered at the latter stage of the respondent’s experience of compulsory education. The problem here is that the individual may have already experienced educational failure, culminating in a negative impact on

the individual's educational identity. However, when dyslexia is discovered it is almost welcome, because provided the individual with an explanation for their difficulties, therefore, providing them with a second chance to achieve academic success. It is still important to recognise that an individual may feel different from their peers because they are playing educational catch up - learning the basics that they failed to acquire previously within their education.

Whilst exploring how the respondents discovered their dyslexia, it was noticeable that the discovery was a life changing moment. Norman talked about the effect.

When I discovered my dyslexia the whole world just turned round. It was just an earth shattering moment it made a really big difference to me. I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. (Norman)

Jane felt relief in knowing that she was dyslexic.

I actually felt relief in knowing that I was dyslexic. This is because it kind of gave me an excuse in telling me that I wasn't thick and stupid. Instead I realised dyslexia was a mechanical problem, which I felt it was a lot easier to deal with. (Jane)

Whilst discovery is important, it does not guarantee that the individual will achieve educational success. This is because the key to a second chance is dependent on coming into contact with individuals who have knowledge of this disability and are, therefore, able to provide appropriate support.

5:1:2 Knowledge of dyslexia displayed by teachers and lecturers

When exploring the respondents' experiences it was noticeable that some teachers and lecturers had more knowledge of dyslexia than others. The respondents mainly talked about their teachers having little knowledge of dyslexia. Jane recalled one negative encounter.

It was embarrassing to sit in front of your teacher and for her to explain where you had gone wrong. Basically my work was chucked

back at me and I was told to do it again. Instead of recognising dyslexia my teachers just thought I was stupid. (Jane)

Tom and James recalled a similar experience.

Dyslexia at the sort of school I went to was a taboo subject because it was a very academic based school, which had a lot of ex-grammar thoughts. I just don't think it was ever taken into account that dyslexia existed within my school. (Tom)

I would say that the majority of my teachers had no knowledge of dyslexia at the schools that I had attended. My dyslexia wasn't recognised and I wasn't aware of it until later in my life, it was a nightmare really. (James)

The problem with teachers not recognising dyslexia is that the respondents may feel not academically capable, therefore, different, because they cannot achieve the same success as their peers. The negative attitude displayed to the respondents by their teachers may also reinforce the feeling of being unable to achieve academic success. The consequence of these negative actions is that the respondents, as indicated by the research, may feel out of place within the educational environment. This may lead to the respondents being unwilling to approach their teachers for help, because of the fear that they would be ridiculed. The respondents, as shown by the investigation of their experiences of education before *access*, also started to resent their teachers because they felt that they were constantly picked on.

In recognising the negative attitude of the respondents' teachers it is necessary to consider why these individuals had no knowledge of dyslexia. One explanation is because dyslexia was not part of their training programme. If so, how would these individuals gain any knowledge of dyslexia? The way in which knowledge would be gained is through a chance event, for example the media - television, newspaper articles or journals. Discovery may also occur through a member of the family becoming aware that they have this disability. Alternatively, discovery may occur

through coming into contact with one of their colleagues who have knowledge of this disability, or a previous student who has been so identified.

When turning to the respondents' experiences of their FE lecturers, a similar lack of knowledge of dyslexia is also displayed. Daniel recalled one lecturer's response to him being dyslexic.

One of my lecturers didn't think I was dyslexic. In fact he blew it off quite quickly when I asked him. I think he didn't think I was dyslexic because I could talk to him intelligently enough. (Daniel)

James recalled a similar experience when he approached adult literacy workers.

I said to them ' I think I might be dyslexic.' Their response was that they did not think that I was. I was told they would have noticed the signs if I was dyslexic. In fact they tried to talk me out of the fact that I might be dyslexic. (James)

Again the explanations for teachers having little or no knowledge of dyslexia could be used here to explain their colleagues' lack of knowledge within Further Education. This lack of knowledge causes concern, because it suggests that educational success, and possibly future life opportunities, are dependent on coming into contact with an individual who happens to have knowledge of dyslexia. This results in others, losing out on the opportunities available to them to help achieve educational success.

When exploring the respondents' experiences further, it was noticeable that some teachers and lecturers did display some limited knowledge of dyslexia. Only one respondent recalled any reference to dyslexia by his teachers:

The first time I ever heard the word dyslexic or dyslexia was mentioned to me by one of my teachers at the age of 15. It was during my final year of my secondary education where she mentioned it off the top of her head in front of the whole class. (Daniel)

This response suggests that there is knowledge of dyslexia within the Compulsory Educational system. However, comparing this response to the lack of knowledge displayed by others teachers, it suggests that there is little knowledge of dyslexia within the Compulsory sector. Support for this claim comes from Daniel who, whilst having heard references to dyslexia at school, did not discover that he was dyslexic until after he left school. Whilst reference to dyslexia suggests knowledge of the disability, it is worrying the way that the reference was made. This is because the individual is being shown as someone different, which again may result in him being stigmatised by his peers. This attitude by one teacher suggests that there is little understanding of how dyslexia may affect the individual. Any knowledge of this disability is, therefore, dependent on individual teachers developing knowledge through their own life experiences.

When exploring the respondents' experiences of College, it was noticeable that some lecturers displayed knowledge of dyslexia. Jane recalled how her lecturer discovered the signs of her dyslexia.

My dyslexia was noticed in my English lectures. It was discovered when I handed some work in, it was the first essay that I'd ever written, which basically started with a capital letter and ended with a full stop two pages later. After my English lecturer read this essay she said that I was dyslexic. (Jane)

Jenny, Norman and Jennet recalled similar positive experiences.

Once they discovered I was dyslexic they always wanted to help. If you had a question at the end of a class they were always there to help you. You could go up and ask and they would give you the answer or they will say what is your opinion. (Jenny)

It was really good that this one lecturer tried to take an interest in me once I told her that I was dyslexic. It seemed that she always wanted to help me with my work, which really encouraged me to work hard at my studies. (Norman)

I felt a lot of my lecturers were like friends, we built up a good working relationship with them, once I told them that I was dyslexic. They were always really helpful and supportive. (Jennet)

The value of these lecturers having knowledge of dyslexia is that it helped to increase the chance of the respondents achieving academic success. By providing the respondents with support and encouragement that they needed to carry on with their studies. The extent of this knowledge is highlighted by dyslexic students being sent to the College Support Service for help, as Jane recalled.

After my English lecturer told me that I was dyslexic she sent me straight away to the support services within the college for help. I was told that I could gain help with my studies here. (Jane)

It seems that Further Education is more geared up to supporting the needs of non-traditional groups. The significance of this supportive approach is that the respondents will feel included and part of the educational environment. Whilst recognising the supportive approach of these lecturers, it is important to ask why these individuals, instead of teachers, have more knowledge of dyslexia. One explanation is that Further Education has become more attuned to supporting a range of non-traditional students' learning needs. This is reflected through lecturers being able to recognise the signs of dyslexia in students' work. Disability Awareness Training may have also occurred through staff development sessions, or staff gaining knowledge through previously coming into contact with dyslexic students. Alternatively, knowledge may have developed through working with fellow staff who have already experienced supporting this group. Furthermore, the provision of College Support Services may also contribute towards increasing knowledge of this disability. It is important to recognise that knowledge of dyslexia can, therefore, help to shape individuals' identity within the educational environment. An individual student may perceive themselves as a failure whilst at school, whereas there might be a change in confidence within academic ability

once moving onto Further Education.

5:2 Parental attitudes towards their child's education whilst at school and college

Whilst exploring the respondent experiences of education before *access* they talked about their parental attitudes towards their education.

5:2:1 Parental encouragement to gain an education

Five of the respondents identified four areas in which their parents encouraged them to gain an education. Encouragement whilst at school:

My parents encouraged me as much as possible to gain an education. They were always telling me that the key to getting on in life was going to school and getting qualifications. (Simon)

Whilst at school, my parents would always check my homework for me and stuff like that before I had to hand it in the following day. Their attitude was really positive towards me, they were always pushing me to gain qualifications. (Norman)

My mother would always encourage me whilst I was at school. She would try and help me as much as possible with my work. I wanted to try hard because I did not want to let her down whilst at school, so I kept on trying. (Daniel)

Return to Education.

When I decided to go back to College I told my mother about my decision to return to education to gain qualifications. She was not at all surprised because she had always been encouraging me to return to College. (Norman)

Encouragement whilst at College.

My mother has always been the one who has been encouraging me whilst I have been at College. She was always asking me have you done that piece of course of work? Have you started revising for your exams? My mother also used to tell me when [support tutor] used to

phone as well. (Jenny)

And education as the key to success.

I am really lucky because my parents see education as the means to achieving something with your life. If I wanted to be a doctor they would push and encourage me to go onto University. (Jennet)

The respondents' parents encouraged their children because they wanted them to achieve success with in education. This is shown through them providing specific encouragement through checking homework and providing emotional support whilst at school and College. These various forms of encouragement could be interpreted as parental ambition, because they identify a good education as the key to a successful life. The respondents' parents have possibly come to this conclusion through their own life experiences and are, therefore, passing this advice onto their children. The respondents' parents might have been aware of their child's difficulties but have been unsure as to how to react or deal with them. They possibly hope that these various forms of support would encourage their children to try harder academically.

One overall characteristic to emerge was that the respondents' parents had no knowledge of dyslexia. This is hardly surprising because it is unlikely that the respondents' parents would have heard of the term dyslexia outside the educational environment. It cannot be guaranteed that they would be able to identify dyslexia within their children. If the respondents' parents discovered dyslexia it is quite likely that they would have looked towards their child's teachers or lecturers to help them confirm their worries. If these teachers or lecturers had no knowledge of dyslexia, it is questionable whether or not this disability would be appropriately identified.

5:2:2 Parents had problems in accepting their difficulties

When exploring the respondents' experiences further, it was noticeable that some of their parents had problems in accepting their child's difficulties. It was Jane who mainly talked about a negative attitude being displayed by her parents, particularly due to her "failure" to meet paternal educational expectations.

Basically they always thought that myself and brothers would go onto school to get our GCSE's, then going onto A levels, then after that go to University. However, because I was not doing that they couldn't accept it and my relationship between my parents and me suffered as a result. (Jane)

One explanation provided by Jane was that her parents were too ambitious about their daughter's academic potential. Alternatively, the respondent's parents may have already experienced academic success, as Jane's brothers had progressed onto University, and, therefore, they expected it of her.

The failure to meet parental expectations results in the respondent not being encouraged to continue with their education. Jane recalled two negative responses from her father. Firstly, she felt that her father "wrote her" off academically.

I think finally in the end, because I was not meeting parental expectations, my father wrote me off academically. He said 'you probably will never do anything and you will probably never get any qualifications in life because you are stupid and you cannot read and write.'(Jane)

And secondly, Jane recalled her father telling her that she was able to undertake further courses.

My father recently phoned me and asked me what I was doing with my life and I said I was on an access course following the A-level syllabus. He thought I was joking. He said 'aren't you a bit too stupid for that?' (Jane)

These negative responses suggest that Jane's father has a very traditional view of education. It also shows little knowledge of the alternative educational routes to Higher Education such as *access* programmes.

The problem with this traditional view is that it is destroying relations between the respondent and her parents. Yet again this negative attitude shows little knowledge of dyslexia, which suggests that this might be a common characteristic. As mentioned before, parents may have no knowledge of dyslexia because they have relied on their child's school to explain any difficulties. Therefore, if the respondents' teachers label their pupils as not academically capable, it is likely that parents will accept such explanations especially given the authority and power teachers are accorded.

It is also necessary to consider the impact of how the respondent parents react to their child's educational experiences. Positive parental support, whilst maintaining good relations with parents, helped the respondents to develop the confidence to carry on with their studies, as reflected throughout the research. The consequence of carrying on would be that it would increase the chances of dyslexia being discovered. Negative parental support, whilst placing strain on the relationship between the respondent and parent, also probably does not help the individual to develop the confidence to carry on with their education leaving them undecided whether or not to carry on or return to education, which, in turn, would reduce the chances of dyslexia being discovered.

5:3 Student relationships whilst at school

When exploring the respondents' experiences of education they talked about the relations with other students at school. Their experiences are grouped around the issue of school friendships.

Four of the respondents recalled forming positive relations with fellow pupils whilst at school. Jenny recalled developing friendships with a specific group of pupils.

Whilst at school I always remember having my own group of friends. We just got on as friends do. We just did normal stuff between each other. I always remember spending time with them when I was at school and helping each other out with homework and exams. (Jenny)

Norman, James and Daniel recalled similar positive experiences.

Everyone was very tight knit in your own little units because they have all been together from primary school and they don't want break out and meet new people. I was also in my own group during school, where I had a brilliant time. (Norman)

So on the rare occasion that I tried to make an effort with my studies, I could not because my friends kept on distracting me. In the end you had to go with the flow and do what everybody else was doing, which was doing little work and trying to annoy the teacher. (James)

I used to sit next to my closest friends within my classes. When we came to spelling we would help each other out, which helped to strengthen my friendship between this individual and myself. These friendships were really good because it encouraged me to attend classes. (Daniel)

These respondents had no problems in forming relations with their peers because fellow pupils perceived them as no different to themselves. This was shown through the respondents working together academically, or interacting together socially, within and outside of school. It is, therefore, important to consider why the respondents' peers did not view them as any different to themselves. One explanation is that the respondents' displayed common mistakes to those of their peers, such as miss spelling words, which resulted in them not standing out. This maybe through the respondents and their peers making common spelling

mistakes, or rebelling against teachers. Obviously this may lead to the suggestion that the respondent peers' were dyslexic themselves and it is chance again, which has resulted in them coming into contact with each other. Another explanation maybe that the respondents' teachers had not treated them negatively, so they did not appear different to their peers. It is also important to highlight that some of the respondents recalled negative relations with their peers. Tom recalled such encounters:

I remember my school masters always telling me that I was stupid within and outside the classroom. The problem I found with this negative attitude is that my fellow school pupils picked up on this negative approach and started to label me as stupid as well, which I found difficult to handle. (Tom)

Some of the respondents encountered negative relationships with their peers because the others were mirroring the negative attitude of their teachers. The attitudes of teachers, therefore appear, to have the potential to shape attitudes towards dyslexic people. It seems more likely that teachers will create a negative instead of a positive attitude towards this group, because of the lack of knowledge about dyslexia. These negative attitudes may result in the respondents feeling isolated within the educational environment. These potential feelings of isolation could lead to the respondents deciding to give up with their education because they believe that they are not capable of achieving academic success.

5:4 Support whilst at School and College

Whilst exploring the respondents' experiences they talked about the support that they had received whilst at school and college. Their encounters are grouped around the issue of teachers and lecturers providing support.

The respondents' experiences of support whilst at school were based around extra spelling and "remedial" support. Daniel and Jenny recalled their experience of extra spelling.

You always got extra spelling help from my teachers especially when I was writing work in class. This type of help really helped me because it gave me the confidence to write, because I always worried that I would spell words wrong and look stupid. (Daniel)

For my English classes we had extra spelling tests all the time. We would normally have one once a week. I remember my teachers telling me that these spelling tests would help us to spell words. (Jenny)

These teachers provided individual help with spelling, apparently because they viewed it as a matter of course. They may have provided this specific help because they identified it as the only area of difficulty within the respondents' work, where they could provide appropriate support. It was also noticeable that some of the teachers only identified spelling as the main difficulty whilst at school.

Apart from the spelling help I never really got any one to one help during my time at school. Yep, I never got any special tuition whilst I was at school and I always wondered why no one really helped me. (Daniel)

It is therefore necessary to consider why these teachers did not recognise the need for additional help. As already mentioned additional help may not have occurred because these teachers had no knowledge of dyslexia and attributed the respondents' difficulties to laziness. Because of this lack of knowledge these teachers may have had no awareness of the support services available within their school, or of effective interventions. Alternative explanations maybe that these schools did not have any support services in place to help this group.

However, the provision of "remedial" education could explain why the respondents' teachers had little knowledge of dyslexia. It seems from the

respondent that an individual would be placed in “remedial” education if they displayed any difficulties, as James recalled.

I felt that when we displayed any difficulties at school you were automatically disposed of and placed within remedial education. I remember once you were placed in remedial education you were forgotten about. (James)

Remedial support, therefore, seems to be a place where problem children are “dumped” together. These “problem” children were probably individuals who did not meet academic expectations. Alternatively, students were placed in remedial education because teachers felt that they were unable to learn within the mainstream environment.

This form of support was possibly viewed as the opportunity to provide these individuals with the one-to-one help that would enable them to re-enter mainstream education at a later date. Whilst the principle behind remedial support seems ideal, in reality a less positive picture was created, as Jane recalled:

When I received remedial support I was taken out of normal lessons and got put into classes with a special teacher. I always remember being told that this teacher was for the slow and stupid pupil. (Jane)

The problem with these individuals receiving “remedial” support is that they are then viewed as someone different from their peers. This feeling of difference is reinforced through the respondents being taken out of the main classroom and taught elsewhere. The consequence of this educational experience results in the respondents being labelled as “not academically capable” by their peers. This may lead to feelings of low confidence in academic abilities, resulting in the respondents wishing to leave the educational environment because they did not want to experience continual labelling.

It is also noticeable that the respondents felt that they had lost friends whilst receiving remedial support. Jane remembered how she lost friends:

Once I started receiving remedial support I felt things started to change whilst I was at school. One change for the worst was me losing friends and fellow school children not wanting to be my friend.
(Jane)

The loss of friends probably occurred because fellow students did not want to be stigmatised for being associated with individuals who were perceived as not being academically capable. These students probably did not maintain or form friendships with the respondents because of the concern that they might be labelled as not academically capable as well. Alternatively, they may have been told that they could not form relationships with these respondents by their parents, because of the concern that these individuals would “lead [their] children astray.” The consequence of this action is that a divide occurs between those who are, and are not, receiving remedial support.

The students who are receiving remedial support could, therefore, be viewed as part of an educational underclass.

When myself and my fellow students came together for our remedial classes it was like an under class. We would resent everything that the remedial teacher would try and teach us and at every opportunity try to resist it. (James)

The respondents reacted negatively against remedial support because they felt that it was not helping them. Maybe these individuals were not interested in remedial support because they felt that it was too general and did not address their individual needs as James recalled:

The material that we were being taught during remedial support was very basic. It was basically lower level stuff, like if you were 13 they

would give you stuff for 8 year olds. It was just so basic, which resulted in me switching off. (James)

This lack of appropriate support suggests that there is little understanding of the needs of these respondents. Remedial education, therefore, seemed to be simply a place to relocate children whom teachers found difficult to teach within the mainstream educational environment, and not truly an opportunity to remedy any difficulties.

When exploring the respondents' experiences of support further they recalled their encounters of help whilst at College. The respondents mainly recalled their lecturers providing support. Jane recalled how her English teacher helped her:

My English lecturer has taught me everything I know. She has taught me punctuation skills. How to use capital letters. How to have a nice style of writing and how to organise and basically read up on my work. (Jane)

Jenny recalled a similar experience.

I would always have problems with Maths but the teacher at this College would always be there to support me. She would help me through extra lessons because she could see that it was a problem. She would always try and help me, which was really good. (Jenny)

These lecturers probably offered support because they were aware of the different needs of individuals entering Further Education. It was possibly felt that a personal approach would encourage the respondents to seek support if they needed it. This approach probably helped the respondents to feel more included within the educational environment, therefore, no different to their peers. One explanation for this positive approach is that lecturers have a greater awareness of the learning needs of non-traditional groups than teachers, which may have occurred through disability awareness sessions or prior academic experience.

However, when exploring the respondents' experiences of Further Education it

was noticeable that some lecturers displayed no support. Norman recalled being taunted by one lecturer, for using his dictaphone, in front of the whole class.

I always remember when I used the dictaphone within the class that the lecturer put me in an awkward situation. She would use it as a stick to taunt the whole of the class. In the end I would just stop using it and things would go on as normal. (Norman)

Inexcusable behaviour by this one lecturer suggests that she had little understanding of the needs of dyslexic students. When Norman's experience of support is explored further, it seems that this lack of understanding was a common characteristic displayed by other lecturers.

I remember all my lecturers using the dictaphone as an instrument of torture when I was in their classes. They kept on picking it up and playing back the tape to the whole class which everyone found very embarrassing. I remember fellow students asking me whether I would be using my dictaphone. (Norman)

The lack of understanding of the learning needs helps this individual to stand out and feel different to their peers. One explanation for these lecturers' actions was that they had no understanding of the needs of the dyslexic student, therefore, they cannot understand why Norman used a dictaphone to record his lectures. The possible impact on the student was that they might "think twice" about seeking support from their lecturers, because they would be concerned that similar encounters would occur. This results in the respondents losing out, because without this support they are unable to achieve their full potential.

When exploring the respondents' experiences of the support available at their selected Institution they recalled mixed encounters. Norman recalled about how he decided on one College because of the support that he was offered:

I remember the College telling me that if I attended there that they would give me a computer and Support Tutor as well as extra time in exams. This help really attracted me to the College. In the end the

only thing that I had was extra time in exams. (Norman)

This promise of support is important, because it is increasing the chances of the individual achieving academic success. He also recalled explanations when the promised support did not appear.

I went to the Special Needs Co-ordinator and she would say 'we are getting people sorted out at the moment, we are on a very tight budget I am just trying to sort it out.' That is what I got all the time. (Norman)

The explanation from this member of staff is wholly unacceptable, because this individual has had his expectations raised unfairly. However, it needs to be considered why this member of staff made such promises about support, but in reality was unable to live up to them. One explanation maybe that this College received additional funds for enrolling dyslexic students on their programmes, but could not provide the support straight away because of the time taken to access funding and to put in place the necessary help. Another explanation could be that the College could not actually obtain the funds to provide any support. It is likely that this respondent possibly thought that similar experiences to school were being repeated, which may have resulted in them questioning the point of furthering their education. It also suggests that a tokenistic approach to supporting dyslexic students was being used because they are unable to provide appropriate help.

A more positive experience of support occurred with one respondent at another College. Jane recalled about being referred to the Learning Centre for support.

I was offered the opportunity to go to the Learning Centre if I needed any help with my work. I was told that I could see various tutors at the Centre as well. This help was really helpful because I could hand work into them to look at before handing it to my tutor. (Jane)

The availability of a Support Unit at this College suggests recognition of the learning needs of the students enrolled on its various programmes. The

significance of this support was that it possibly helped to create a feeling of inclusion for the respondents, by suggesting recognition of their needs within the educational environment. The availability of this Support Unit may also encourage students to seek help with their difficulties, which in turn could lead to the discovery of dyslexia as an explanation for their problems. The significance of these Units is that they help to raise and maintain understanding of the needs of non-traditional learners, such as dyslexics, with lecturers. At a broader level, the recognition of the needs of these students within the educational environment may help to challenge the oppression disabled people face through helping to create a more inclusive society.

5:5 Discussion

A substantive explanation for the respondents' experiences of education before *access* is that many academics (teachers & lecturers) do not have any knowledge of dyslexia. It is the lack of knowledge that academics have of dyslexia and the way in which it can affect the individual that appears to influence the respondents' experiences of school and College.

In recognising that the students' experience can be influenced by academics' knowledge of dyslexia, there is an acknowledgement that these professionals are in a powerful position. These individuals are able to contribute towards shaping expectations of the individual student and how parents, family and peers viewed the respondents' educational performance.

Academics (teachers & lecturers) have the potential to shape attitudes towards dyslexia, which has already been shown through academics having the potential to instil either a positive or negative educational identity in the individual student. The significance of a student coming into contact with an academic who has knowledge of dyslexia is that it is then more likely that they will receive

institutional support to help them with their studies. Through staff or institutional support, or a combination of both, the chances a dyslexic student being able to develop a more positive educational identity are increased, which, in turn, increases the chances of achieving qualifications. Alternatively, if a dyslexic student does not come into contact with a knowledgeable academic, it is likely that they will receive no support with their studies which increases their chances of educational failure. Staff experience of dyslexia and how it affects the individual therefore plays, an important role in determining whether or not a dyslexic student is encouraged to carry on with their education.

Academics are in a powerful position because they, along with Educational Psychologists, are the individuals who may provide an assessment of a child's academic abilities. The impact of academics in shaping parental attitudes is that they can influence the relationship between the child and their parents either positively or negatively. The positive effect is that when dyslexia is discovered it can result in the individual student's parents realising that their child can achieve academic success. Through academics and parents working together to provide academic and emotional support, an enabling environment is created which increases the chance of dyslexic students being able to achieve academic success. The negative effect, as already shown by Jane, is that there is a breakdown in relations between the individual and their parents which results in a feeling of exclusion from the family as well as from school friends.

Moving onto the respondents' peers, it is also noticeable here that academics have the potential to shape the perceptions of dyslexia. This is shown through Tom remembering how his fellow students mirrored the negative attitude of his teachers. It is, therefore, likely that the images teachers present are adopted by the respondents and their peers because they are reflected in the wider representation of disability within the media. Academics, therefore, have the potential to

influence, creating either a socially divided or an inclusive society, by reinforcing or challenging traditional attitudes towards dyslexia and, at a more general level, to disabled people as a whole.

A formal explanation for the dyslexic's student experience is that dyslexia is potentially not recognised within schools or Colleges, because of a range of factors such as inappropriate or limited institutional support available to this group.

Turning to school, there was inappropriate institutional support available to dyslexic students within this sector. The only help available was the provision of "remedial" support, which aimed to be a forum wherein all students who were struggling within mainstream education could pick up on the skills that they were lacking. The problem with the support provision in Compulsory Education occurs at two levels. Firstly dyslexic students are taken out of the mainstream educational environment. Secondly, the support provision in Compulsory Education was apparently being used more as a dumping ground for problem students, as reflected within the research. One explanation why there is limited or inappropriate support is because there has been a continual debate over whether dyslexia exists within society. Portsmouth and Caswell (1988) reflect this position through suggesting that dyslexia was viewed more as occurring in the imagination of middle-class parents than a genuine difficulty. A similar picture was discovered by Miles and Miles (1990) where they discovered a lack of recognition by educationalists of dyslexia and the unwillingness to provide assessment for support through Statementing.

The first barrier that the "remedial" support provision in Compulsory Education creates is a feeling of difference between dyslexics and their non-disabled peers. This feeling of difference was illustrated through Jane recalling how she felt when receiving such help. Instead of trying to foster an inclusive environment the

support provision within Compulsory Education is creating a divided educational sector between those who need and do not need help with their studies. The problem with this division is that it can encourage a negative attitude towards students, such as dyslexics, who are receiving support. This can result in this group being perceived as not academically capable because of the additional support they are receiving with their studies.

The problem with this negative attitude is that it could be transmitted to the outside world, which could lead to dyslexics being perceived as being unable to undertake certain tasks, such as the ability to write reports. The difficulty here is that dyslexic people can feel they are marginalised within society.

The second barrier, which the dyslexic respondents had to face, is that the “remedial” support provision was used more as a dumping ground for all problem students. The problem here is dyslexics are not able to receive the appropriate support because the need of the whole group are too diverse to be met. The impact of inappropriate support is that dyslexic students may question the point of available help. This may result in the individual “playing up” during their sessions, or non-attendance, which leads to the student being categorised as “disruptive.” The effect of this approach is that the individual dyslexic is unable to achieve the academic success they are capable of achieving, because of the inappropriate nature of the support that they have received whilst at school. The consequence of being placed within the support provision available in Compulsory Education is that the individual student will be categorised as an educational failure unless they can move out from such an environment.

A more general explanation for the respondents encountering inappropriate support is because of the introduction of “market principles” into Compulsory Education through the introduction of the National Curriculum via the Education

Reform Act 1988. Taking into consideration the introduction of market principles, the introduction of testing and league tables, the educational opportunities available to dyslexic and other disabled students would be restricted because they are perceived as requiring "too much" support. As highlighted by Barnes et al (1999):

In a climate of 'league tables' of performance, schools will be reluctant to take pupils thought likely to take up extra resources and lower exam results, and the stigmatisation of disabled children may well be exacerbated. (p.108).

The problem facing dyslexic students is that they may not have had their disability recognised or support provided because they are perceived as not cost effective students to teach within Compulsory Education. This helps to enforce the feelings of difference because both groups perceive each other as different which helps to develop the negative images disabled people face within society.

Moving on to Further Education, there is limited institutional support available to dyslexic students. Limited support occurs because some institutions seem to be more prepared to meet the needs of dyslexics than others. This is reflected through Jane recalling the support service available at the College where she was studying at. In contrast, Daniel attended a college which did not provide the support he was originally promised. One barrier facing dyslexic students is, therefore, in the ability to select a college that is able to provide appropriate support. In determining the right College dyslexic students seem to be in a good position because they are able to establish what support is available through the Disability Statements which Colleges are asked to produce through the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). However, it was noticeable throughout the research that none of the students made any reference to these Disability Statements.

Respondents such as Jane encountered an improved experience at College, such as the discovery of dyslexia, because Further unlike Compulsory Education is more responsive to individual need. As reflected through Bird et al (1994):

The staff [in FE] are accessible...they're not locked away...there are plenty of people you can get access to. (p.42).

The respondents encountered an improved experience of education whilst at College because staff are more accessible in providing support and advice when accessing their selected programme. More specific developments that could have contributed towards the respondents having an improved experience whilst at College include these individuals were benefiting from the increased awareness of disability issues such as dyslexia through reports such as the Tomlinson Inquiry (FEFC, 1996). Combining the increased awareness of the needs of disabled students through reports such as Tomlinson and the willingness of Further Educational staff to provide support, it is not surprising that some of the respondents received help.

In exploring why there is limited knowledge of dyslexia at schools and Colleges, it is important to link the Substantive and Formal theories together, into a more general explanation. A Cumulative explanation is that the limited knowledge of dyslexia within society is a result of the hidden nature of this disability. The "inability" to spot dyslexia, unless you have experience at a personal or professional level, could explain why there is limited knowledge of this disability. This could possibly be the case because dyslexia is not perceived as a recognised disability throughout society. This is because traditional attitudes towards disability are more represented as visible, instead of a hidden nature which is reflected through films such as the 'Born on the Fourth of July' (1989) which represent disabled people as superhuman individuals, overcoming immense personal tragedy.

It is possibly the hidden nature of dyslexia which results in knowledge of this disability being gained through chance more than any other mode of discovery, resulting in uncertainty over whether or not this group would have a positive or negative experience of education and the wider society.

On the whole the dyslexic respondents had mixed experiences of school and College. The main reason why is because of the limited knowledge of dyslexia between academics and the inappropriate or limited support provision available to this group. It is important to be aware that the respondents may have encountered inappropriate or limited support because the additional needs of disabled students were only starting to be recognised within mainstream education. The problem with these negative experiences is that dyslexic students will not be able to achieve the academic success of which they are capable, which potentially results in this group either giving up or dropping out of education. Because of these earlier negative encounters it is likely that respondents will not want to return to education for fear of a repeat of such encounters. However, if they do, there is the responsibility on educational providers to show that similar negative experiences would not be repeated in their return to education.

Chapter 6 “Access was a way to better things, a new start.”

Experiences of starting access

6:1 Discovery of access

All of the respondents identified different ways in which they became aware of *access*. A friend recommended *access*.

A friend recommended *access*. He had found out about this course somehow. I remember him doing the *access* course last year. He told me about finding out about it through the college prospectus. (Tom)

I heard about an *access* course from a friend who had completed the *access* course last year. She said it was brilliant because it got her used to studying again and got her into university. (Jane)

Aware of *access* through publicity materials.

I discovered *access* through publicity at various places, but again they didn't specify that there was a difference between *access* to Further Education and *access* to Higher Education. They didn't say in any of the publicity what the difference was. (Simon)

I found the *access* course through the local college prospectus. The regional college is the main area for education. I just remember going into the college one day and being asked about courses and I was given material on *access*. (Daniel)

Assumed colleges ran *access* courses.

I think a friend went to one a very long time ago. They seemed like colleges who do A level's. I assumed colleges did *access* courses. I don't know if that is the case. I am not sure, but I guess they do. (James)

Aware of *access* through mother.

My mother told me about *access*. It was purely word of mouth. I think she found out about it when she was enrolled at the college, which she had a really good time at. (Norman)

Personal knowledge of *access*.

I have heard the term *access* mentioned as far as general conversation. I was quite ignorant to what exactly was involved. It made more sense when my mum told me that *access* courses were available at college.(Daniel)

These explanations suggest that there is no specific way in which the respondents discovered *access*. A closer examination shows that it is more by chance, such as word of mouth, which would be a recommendation from a parent, relative, partner or friend, than by any official route (such as college publicity) that the respondents find out about *access*. It is important to investigate what this form of informal discovery means for adults considering this programme as a mode of study. For a person, who encountered difficulties previously with their education, a personal recommendation could be crucial because it may determine whether or not the individual decides to proceed with their education. Also, a positive or negative experience reported by a friend may determine whether or not the individual declares their disability which may determine whether or not dyslexia is discovered. One possible explanation as to why it was more common for these respondents to discover *access* through word of mouth is that College publicity was limited. This view is supported with Simon's recollection of *access* publicity not clearly distinguishing between *access* programmes to Further and Higher Education. The participating colleges did not rely on literature to promote *access* because these Institutions relied on word of mouth. This was the case with College A, that invited previous students back to talk about their experiences of *access* to new students. The value of this approach is that it can help to provide a realistic picture of the course and College, therefore reinforcing or challenging any preconceived views that prospective or new students may have about their return to education. Alternatively, Colleges of Further Education may think that they do not need to promote their *access* courses because they are not in direct competition

with other Institutions for adults who wish to return to education usually have to attend their local college. This idea is reinforced when looking at the respondents' financial experiences on *access* - they looked for the nearest College rather than shopping around.

6:2 Nervous about starting access

Three of the respondents talked about feeling nervous about their return to education.

I felt uncertain about going back to College, but I found the relations with staff quite positive. It has been more of a struggle than I thought it would have been. (James)

What didn't I feel? Nervous - just not quite knowing about the course and not knowing how it works. (Tom)

I felt really nervous, it was like in some respects a dream coming true. At the same time it was still a dream, it didn't feel real it felt as if I wasn't living in reality. It was like I wanted desperately to do it but thought that academically I would never achieve it. I thought I couldn't do it and that I was just going along to see it and go along for a laugh. (Jane)

Jenny was nervous about her return to education because it reminded her of school:

Like going back to school, it used to be quite funny. It was really strange going back into studying again, sitting down and reading a book. I enjoyed it, but to begin with it was really strange like your first day at school. I hated school but I like going to College. (Jenny)

Simon was worried about his return to education.

Very apprehensive. But I thought it is now or never. There are not that many years left. Initially I was very apprehensive but the first few weeks were the worst worrying about actually what was expected of me and then the written work and later the Maths. (Simon)

There are numerous reasons why the respondents felt nervous about their return to education. When their experiences were explored further the respondents expanded on why they felt apprehensive about their return to the educational environment and provided specific reasons for their fears and concerns. One was the uncertainty over whether they were academically capable.

I wasn't sure, being as I had somebody I knew [support tutor], I thought, well I have got somebody I can talk to which is important, I think, and the fact that she has a more academic background. (Simon)

Tom and Daniel reinforce this view.

You are so aware of what your limitations are and capabilities are that every time you sit down and readdress another assignment you know that it is going to be challenging. You know perhaps how much more work there is for you to achieve, perhaps compared to other students, but you also know that you are quite capable of doing it. (Daniel)

I think it was because I thought I was brighter than I was. I am not and it was interesting to see that I won't be an academic type whatsoever. The only thing I will is to get two degrees through necessity rather than choice. (Tom)

Tom recalled being uncertain about what was required as one of the reasons why he felt nervous about starting *access*:

Apprehension, not quite knowing what to do and how the student life is, when to be in College and when not to be in and what you were allowed to do. As you change career and as you change life not quite knowing what to do and how much to do and when to do it. Even though you are told you don't quite know. (Tom)

He also recalled a concern over whether *access* would get him into University.

We were frightened. For instance, a couple of girls, who came back from last year's course, said 'you are wasting your time in doing it because nobody let us into university.' (Tom)

There are many reasons, which are possibly interlinked, that resulted in these respondents feeling nervous about their return to education, these are mainly based around the concern that the poor experiences encountered previously within their education would be repeated. The implication of these prior educational encounters was that the respondents had low confidence in their own academic abilities. Therefore, they are possibly concerned that when they re-entered the educational environment, through *access*, those poor experiences would be repeated. These feelings of anxiety are compounded because of the additional pressure, such as financial constraints, that the respondents were under when they started *access*. This is shown with Daniel, Simon and James displaying constant concern that their benefits would be cut by the Benefits Agency. These feelings of anxiety are compounded because they realise this is their second chance and possibly the last opportunity that they will have to achieve any academic success in their lives.

After the respondents started *access* they felt less nervous about their return to education. Simon recalled how his concerns had gone after he started the course.

So, I have actually enjoyed most of my time here. Its just the initial apprehension and the first couple of weeks but after a month I settled down quite easily. (Simon)

Jenny talked about similar feelings.

Only a couple of weeks really until you have got yourself into a routine of what you were doing. It was only a couple of weeks and it was all right afterwards, it wasn't such a problem. (Jenny)

These respondents' educational experiences improved when they started *access* because they realised those previous bad encounters and concerns would not occur. This is shown, with the respondents encountering positive relations with their peers. There are many reasons why the respondents had a much-improved experience after they started *access*. One of the reasons provided by the

respondents was that they have grown up, which has altered their perception of education. Whilst they were children they perceived school as something that they had to attend, which they resented for various reasons as shown in the respondent experiences of education before *access*. However, on their return to education they are faced with the reality of having to achieve some academic success if they are to move forward in their lives, which is shown later in this chapter. Alternatively, their lecturers are possibly treating them as adults, therefore, more as equals which may contribute towards a more positive experience. It is suggested here, and earlier, that it is the anticipation of what to expect that caused the apprehension with the respondents. It is only when they started their course that they realised that they could have a much more positive experience of education, possibly a fresh start. When marketing *access*, it is necessary to tackle the concerns that disabled and non-disabled students have through various media, such as prospectuses, radio and leaflets, which may lead to them overcoming their difficulties.

6: 3 Family attitudes towards access

6:3:1 Parents are supportive

Nearly all the respondents said their parents displayed a supportive attitude towards them starting *access*. According to the respondents some of their parents displayed a supportive attitude at various stages of their *access* experience. Some of the respondents said their parents encouraged their children to attend from the start.

My parents were all for it, even my auntie an ex English teacher she was all for it. My fiancée was and wasn't. He was quite pleased for me to go and better myself, but when it came to doing more and more study and spend more and more time in a Library or at home in silence, he didn't like that. (Jenny)

Parental support in particular my mother gave me the strength to make the decision to leave full-time employment, and return to education through programmes such as access to improve my life opportunities. (Daniel)

My cousin, who acted as surrogate parents after my real parents had died was very enthusiastic about all education, she enjoys it very much. She is always trying to encourage me to do anything in the education world. Unfortunately she is very busy. (Simon)

Parental support can, therefore, act as a key to whether or not the respondents decided to re-enter the educational environment. The positive encouragement as reflected within the research provided the respondents with the confidence that they needed to make the jump from employment to education. It is noticeable that an individual, whether or not they are disabled, views it as a gamble to re-enter education because they are often giving up the security of full-time employment. This feeling of insecurity could be a reason why they looked to their family for reassurance that they were making the right decision.

As the course progressed the respondents also recalled members of their family, who previously were not supportive, having a change in attitude. Tom recalled how his father had become more pleased that he undertook *access* as it neared completion.

My father is reasonably thrilled in his own way. I think in some respects he would have liked to do more educationally but he came from the wrong end of town. (Tom)

James recalled how his family had become progressively supportive.

My family are becoming more interested and more understanding why I am doing *access*, but I don't think they understand what I want to achieve from it and why. (James)

Maybe these respondents families are becoming more supportive because they are starting to understand the importance of education within determining life and

career opportunities available to the individual within society. Perhaps because of their own life experiences, these were mentioned by the participants at various stages of the study.

These individuals are progressively realising the shift in emphasis to qualifications instead of work experience, which valued by their own parents as the key towards success within society. This occurred through the respondent parents discovering that they cannot gain jobs because of lack of qualifications. As parents realise this shift in emphasis from their own experiences they begin to realise that it is important to provide support and encouragement. James supports this view, when he provided a reason why his family had become more interested.

I think it is mainly because they have not actually been involved in furthering their education themselves so there is not any background knowledge or experience of it. I think my parents have after their own experiences realised qualifications are the key to success within society. (James)

The support of parents plays an important role in encouraging the individual to return to education and, just as importantly, encourage the individual to continue with their studies, which will hopefully lead to academic success.

6:3:2 Negative family reactions

When exploring the respondent experiences they talked about their families displaying a negative reaction towards them starting *access*.

It was all my family, they had a very negative attitude but I kind of chose to ignore them and do what I wanted to do for once. (Jane)

And more specifically Jane recalled how her sister thought *access* was too much for her.

I think the biggest let down of all was my eldest sister because she

normally does support me in most things. Whatever I did she would normally support me but she didn't like the idea of me going to university. She kept saying perhaps you won't cope with it and she came out with a lot of negative responses. So I think I was more upset with her than I was with my parents. (Jane)

Tom recalled a similar family response.

Yes it would be nice to get a bit of encouragement from family but we don't have much to do with them. I think they do not want to give it because they are admitting that they are wrong. (Tom)

His grandmother echoed a similar negative attitude.

You do not need to go to school. By the age of 16 you should be working like real men do getting jobs and having babies. So we just smile to ourselves and try to ignore the comments, which are very funny sometimes in her broken English. (Tom)

These respondents experienced negative attitudes because their families did not recognise the value of attending College to further their career. As mentioned before, one explanation, especially for Tom, is that his family placed more of an emphasis on working instead of education. This is perhaps the respondents brothers and sisters are mirroring the reaction of their parents, in adopting the view that you do need to progress onto College and University to improve your career opportunities. Norman supports this view when he recalled how his stepfather reacted when he wanted to further his education.

My step dad wasn't really impressed about it to tell you the truth. My mum was trying to suggest that I should do something to better myself. My step dad said that if you are going to further your education you will have to support yourself through working and studying through apprenticeships. (Norman)

The financial cost of supporting the respondents whilst at college, which their parents may have to provide, could have resulted in feelings of resentment. Instead of supporting their children financially, their parents look to day release

schemes or apprenticeships as an opportunity to advance their career. It is likely these opportunities were favoured by the respondents' families, such as Norman's, because they were more the accepted norm when progressing through their education as a youth. Alternatively, the lack of family support is based around the respondent relatives not being aware of the various educational opportunities available, or simply not being able to afford the support cost.

6: 4 Reasons for undertaking access

6:4:1 Access suited their needs

Nearly all the respondents identified *access* as a programme of study that suited their needs. They identified four areas in which *access* specifically suited them. Could get to university without doing A Levels.

All I knew was that if I did an *access* course you didn't have to get A levels to get to university. So I was just looking one day through the college prospectus and saw it there and thought brilliant. (Jane)

Access suited mature students.

I was attracted to *access* because it is specifically designed for those who are over the age of 21, who perhaps didn't get any formal qualifications and are A Level standard. (Tom)

I started the course because it was aimed at mature people, who had gone out and done things with their lives. It suited me because it offered a chance to return to education. (Norman)

It was the fact it was designed to fit around people with other things in life to do, like children and a house to keep up and work. It fits in with everything. It is very flexible and yet you still have the discipline and you still have certain deadline dates that you had to put essays and things in for. (Jenny)

Able to undertake additional qualifications.

You have got the option to sit the A level exams. You can go and just sit the exams to see how you would have done like sitting on AS levels. So you have the chance to come out with more than just your *access* qualification. (Tom)

The best qualification available.

Access was the best qualification because it offered the subjects I wanted to study, and it allowed me to leave full-time employment and re-enter education straight away. (Daniel)

Simon thought *access* was the best qualification because it was the quickest one he could obtain.

If I did A Levels you are talking about it taking me at least 2 years because I would do my best to take one subject on its own. However, with *access* I was aware that I would take one year and I thought it was the best option for me. (Simon)

These respondent experiences suggest there are many reasons why these individuals, and others, decided to undertake this programme of study. However, with three of the respondents stating that they were attracted to *access* because it was designed for mature students, suggests that this is an influencing factor when deciding to return to education. Who the course is aimed at was one of the priorities for these respondents, because they felt that it allowed them to maintain their outside responsibilities, such as employment or family. The other reasons that the respondents have identified, such as the ability to undertake additional qualifications, became more prominent after the respondents had adjusted to their return to education. When deciding on which course, it seems that the respondents invested a lot of time and effort establishing which programme of study would suit their immediate needs and help them to realise their goals.

6:4:2 Access was a way to better themselves

The respondents identified *access* as a way to better themselves and gave this as one reason why they undertook the course. Jane felt undertaking *access* would help her to become a Social Worker.

I looked at the College prospectus and it had an *access* course in Social Work, which I thought was brilliant, so I went along to the College and talked to them. (Jane)

Jenny felt that through *access* she could become a veterinary nurse.

I started *access* because I wanted to get a good education that would allow me to change my career and get another job. I wanted to go and become a Veterinary Nurse. (Jenny)

Tom felt this programme of study would help him to become a priest.

I am a slightly more practical person. If I need to do *access* then two degrees, I will do it if it will get me into the church. I just realised that if I wanted a professional career I needed qualifications. (Tom)

Norman, Daniel and Simon had no specific career in mind, but they still felt *access* would improve their life opportunities.

I wanted to do something better which would help me to push myself. I just wanted to get my head working again as opposed to sitting down and letting it all go to waste. (Norman)

A change in career. I was dissatisfied in the careers that I had been involved in and most of them were dead end jobs. Most of them required a huge amount of effort and time and there was so much emphasis on overtime. (Daniel)

I have never done any skilled work. Never done anything like office work, white collar work. Access was an opportunity to improve my own career opportunities. (Simon)

These respondents identified *access* as a chance to improve their life opportunities by providing them with the route to obtain a new career. To achieve this change in career the majority of the respondents realised that they would probably have to go to University.

The thing I wanted to do could only come about by me going to University and getting a degree. Otherwise you can't go and work as a Veterinary Nurse without the right qualifications. So it possibly was to make up for my failings at school. (Jenny)

Jane also realised that she would also have to go to University if she wanted to become a Social Worker.

I need to get to University if I want to go into Social Work, which I still very much want to do. It was an opportunity for a career change. It's been great because I am learning new things all the time. (Jane)

Irrespective of what career the respondent decided on, it is evident that they all identified *access* as the best opportunity that would lead them towards a new life.

6:4:3 Access was appealing

Another reason why the respondents undertook *access* was because they found it appealing, as it was flexible and well structured. The participants identified three areas in which they felt the course was flexible.

Able to attend various classes.

If you couldn't fit one English group with something else or if it overlapped with an *access* subject there was always another English group that you could attend. So the timetable was pretty good. (Jane)

Flexible hand-in dates.

They give you plenty of scope and a fair amount of freedom, they are pretty flexible because deadlines are set and they come and go but you have finally got one set deadline now before Easter. (Simon)

Varied course material.

The fact that it was very varied, it wasn't just drawing and painting. As much as I love it, I wanted to see how other things were undertaken, such as sculpture, which I had thought about in the past. It is the variety I like about this course. (Simon)

These respondents found *access* flexible because it met their individual needs, which are clearly diverse. This flexibility allowed the participants to gain the most from their return to the educational environment, such as undertaking new subjects and additional qualifications as well as meeting their outside commitments. The significance of this approach is that it may help to develop self-confidence to the extent that the respondents feels no different to their non-disabled peers, which may encourage them to stay and progress with their education.

The respondents also identified the structure of *access* as another appealing factor. These individuals talked about five areas in which they found it well structured.

Assessment after each module.

After each block you are given an assignment to do, either an essay or an exam. It is ok because this way you know you have just got to read up on or to that part and you have got to just know everything about it, instead of trying to learn everything. (Jenny)

Emphasis on coursework made *access* manageable.

Doing coursework has taken a lot more weight off my shoulders, as the pressure would have been on me to do well in the exams. Instead you have got marks in the bag before you even start and if you do well on your course work there is very little pressure at all. (Norman)

Able to undertake additional qualifications.

It is a great appeal. You can do this and something else as opposed to just GCSE's or 3 A levels. It is great because you can do what you really have to do and then what you want to do and something else. I did a GCSE in IT and something else just because it was something that I wanted to do. Doing this doesn't detract in any way from your other lessons. (Norman)

It is a good course to do because you are running alongside the A level students, so you can sit your A level exams. If your grades are good enough you are able to get into University and failing that you can fall back onto your *access* certificate. You have got two options, two ways to get to University. (Jane)

Do not have to be at College all week.

It is certainly been easy for me in structuring my week. We attend this *access* course 3 days a week as in a full day Tuesday, Thursday and a Friday morning and key skills Friday afternoon. So it has made it viable for me to do this course because it's scattered over 14 hours, 2.5 - 3 days. (Daniel)

Prepares you for University.

The modular structure of *access* has helped to prepare me for the University system where you are assessed as you go along, instead of mounting up the knowledge keeping it in your head and cramming it in at the last moment and spurning it out in an exam. (Tom)

These respondents identified very different reasons why they thought *access* was well structured, which again suggests they are selecting their respective course because they are directly tailored to their needs. Also, these differences show that the respondents wanted different things from their respective *access* programmes - Jane and Norman liked the structure because it allowed them to undertake additional qualifications, whilst Tom viewed *access* as a preparation for Higher Education. This suggests that programmes of study have to be flexible and well structured if they are to meet the needs of students.

6:4:4 Locality of College helped in the discovery of access

Nearly all the respondents recalled the locality of each participating college as one of the ways in which they discovered *access*.

It was easier, easier for me to get to. I mean, it is so easy 15 minutes at the most. Across the A5, through [town] and then I am here. (Jenny)

It's like location. It wasn't too far, but it is important to be apart from the local area. (James)

Local. Regional, I am within 5 miles. Access is 15 minutes by vehicle. Cost minimal, just travelling expenses. (Daniel)

Local no other reason than the fact that it is local. (Tom)

The locality of a college was important to the respondents because it helped them to meet their other commitments. It is likely, that when these individuals started *access* they would have more responsibilities than younger students, such as running a household. Locality would also help the respondents to keep financial costs down to a minimum, which is understandable, because all the participants supported themselves financially or relied on State benefits. If anything the responsibility and commitment placed on these respondents when they enrol on *access* is a lot greater than fellow students enrolled on other courses. This is because they have often left employment on the gamble that they can improve life opportunities through qualifications. Failure to achieve this goal may result in the respondents being in a worse position than before their return to education, which was a concern reflected by the respondents. Alternatively, some of the respondents did not have any choice in selecting their local College because it was the only Institution that ran a suitable *access* programme.

I did phone other colleges to see if they did *access* in Social Work but nobody else did or had really heard of it. So basically because of that my local College was the right one. (Jane)

When also selecting an *access* programme, the respondents seemed to select the easiest one.

The *access* course at [College] is infinitely more difficult than the one at [participating College]. You need rating credits all at Level 3. For instance a Psychology essay here is worth one credit, over there you need six, virtually equivalent Psychology essays to make one credit. (Tom)

It is also important that the right facilities are in place for the respondents if they are to start *access* at a specific College:

I said 'Have you got any scanners or anything?' They said, 'No but we do have computers.' It was crap. I wasn't very impressed, but [town] is not a happening place anyway. (James)

In contrast to Norman, who attended a College with an established support provision.

The support has been here for ages. They have been ongoing, certainly since my mum has been but they have been here five or six years before. (Norman)

Apart from a College being local, the need for the Institution to offer the right course and facilities, which suit the respondent, is important when helping the individuals make a decision. However, it is important to recognise that not everyone's needs will be met, which may result in some individuals looking to other colleges for a suitable *access* programme. This has obvious implications such as increased financial cost due to extra travel. James and Norman also highlighted another important characteristic - each College had a different support provision for dyslexic students. If an individual was already aware of their disability then the level of support offered by a specific College may influence whether or not they

decide to return to education. This was the case with Norman because he decided to enrol on an *access* course at College D because it offered him the best support. It is also noticeable that because this College offered the right support, Norman was prepared to travel.

The environment also formed an important part of the respondent experiences when they decided on an *access* programme at a specific College. Simon preferred a small and quiet College.

It was a fairly quiet atmosphere for schooling as well. That is another thing because it is pretty quiet and that suits me I don't like a lot of hustle and bustle. (Simon)

And a College with old buildings.

I have got a thing about new buildings and old buildings. It is because of my school days but I prefer small old buildings to large modern ones. (Simon)

This respondent preferred older instead of newer buildings because he felt more secure within this environment. The older buildings probably reminded him of happy childhood memories with his family. Whereas the newer buildings reminded Simon of the negative memories that he had at school. The significance of these experiences is that when an individual decides to re-enter the educational environment they bring with them previous educational experiences. Educators, therefore, need to take previous educational experiences into consideration. As already shown in College A, attempts were made to show that prior negative experience will not re-occur by ex-students talking to new ones.

It is noticeable that disability does not feature strongly with all the respondents when they decided to return to education through *access*. This is probably because the majority of the participants, whilst in education before *access*, were not aware of their dyslexia (apart from James and Norman). Alternatively, the respondents at

this stage of their educational experience had not developed enough of an understanding about how dyslexia affected them. It seems likely that if the other respondents were aware of their dyslexia when they enquired about *access* that they would have placed a similar emphasis on the provision and level of support available, which James and Norman did. Therefore, the question needs to be raised whether or not the respondents who were not aware of their dyslexia until they started this programme of study would have enrolled on *access* programmes at other Colleges if they had discovered their disability earlier.

6: 5 Discussion

It is now necessary to turn to a discussion of the respondent experiences of starting *access*. This is achieved by providing a substantive, formal and cumulative explanation as well as highlighting the barriers the respondents faced whilst enrolled on *access*.

A specific explanation for the respondents, who returned to education via *access*, is that they wanted to improve their life opportunities through the acquisition of qualifications. The motivation behind the return to education was an attempt to obtain the necessary qualifications which would open up new career opportunities to this group, such as the chance to become a Social Worker (Kelly, 1996). Before the respondents returned to education they were unable to progress with their lives in the direction they wished. They did not have either the right, or enough, qualifications to obtain a professional career, such as becoming a Veterinary Nurse or a Priest.

It is now necessary to establish what barriers were had the potential to restrict the respondents when returning to education in order to improve their career opportunities. The first obstacle the respondents faced was a non-educational barrier the individual student's family. The significance of the family attitude,

which would include grandparents, parents, sisters and brothers, is that it can encourage or discourage the individual to return or carry on with their education. Supportive families clearly encouraged the individual because they identify education, and the gaining of qualifications, as the route towards much improved career opportunities as shown through the positive reaction of Jenny, Daniel and Simon. Alternatively, a non-supportive family can clearly have a counter productive effect by discouraging an individual to return or carry on with their education. This is because the respondent's family probably think that these respondents are not capable of achieving educational success – a view dependent on an assessment of the individual of their own educational experiences and their interpretation of disability. But, as Jane has shown, the negative family attitudes can be counterbalanced by supportive friends. Whatever position the family adopts they can play an important role in shaping attitudes towards education and the value of obtaining qualifications.

The educational barriers that hampered the respondents when they started *access* are mainly focussed around two areas. The first problem area was that it was often down to chance that the respondents found out about *access*. This is supported through the respondents finding out about *access* through friends, family and the media or college prospectus. These various methods of discovery seem to be quite common, as is shown by the research of Bond et al (1997). The difficulty with this form of discovery is that some individuals will be fortunate enough to find out about this educational route, whereas others will not. The variety of discovery is reinforced with none of the respondents or staff, who participated in the research, making any reference to *access* literature being available in alternative formats, which suggests that sensory impaired students may never find out about this educational route. The emphasis on chance also raises the question – what happens to the individuals who are not fortunate enough to find out about *access*? It is likely

that these individuals would be unable to improve their career opportunities because they are unaware of this particular educational opportunity.

The second educational barrier that the respondents faced was their negative prior educational experiences. The problem here is that the participants were concerned that the earlier negative encounters that they faced whilst at school and College would be repeated when they returned to education. The respondents were concerned that their peers and lecturers would label them as "not academically capable." Irrespective of any disability, it is possible that students who enrol on *access* may have to overcome feelings of low self-esteem (Stephenson and Percy 1989). Dyslexia only becomes an additional hurdle once the student has become aware of it. This results in the individual having to come to terms with their dyslexia, as well as developing support strategies to enable them to achieve academic success.

Moving onto a more conceptual interpretation, the data that suggests that the educational system has the power to shape the opportunities available to dyslexics. The power of the education system is based on the qualifications it offers – a potential passport to a new career, therefore, improved life opportunities. This point of view was reflected through the respondents' reporting returning to education to obtain further qualifications in order to improve career opportunities because they wanted to better themselves (McFadden, 1995).

The availability of *access* suggests that the educational system is offering more flexible opportunities for an individual to return to studying by offering them a different way in which to obtain qualifications. Through *access* being more flexible - offering varied course material and the emphasis on course work - it is attempting to provide an educational opportunity which responds to individual needs as much as possible. *Access* courses are on par with A Level standards but

differ in the flexible delivery of its curriculum. However, as an academic qualification, *access* is possibly only viewed as an equivalent to A Levels in particular contexts. This point was reflected by the respondents, who felt that *access* was a qualification to get them into university rather than helping them obtain a job. Karkalas and Mackenzie (1995) reinforced this view, when they discovered that over three quarters of the individuals who took part in their research were encouraged to carry on studying. However, the research also revealed that the individuals who did not carry on studying after *access* did experience new career opportunities, or felt they could perform their jobs better.

The picture that emerges is that when undertaking *access* there are many reasons that influence the respondents in their decision to return to education. There are clearly some barriers that the respondents need to overcome if they are to have a successful experience, such as their negative prior educational experience and the emphasis on chance discovery of *access*. Once starting *access*, the respondents seem to have an improved educational experience, which suggests this route is possibly providing this group with the opportunity to better their lives by providing them with a qualification and the opportunity to progress onto Higher Education. The return to education suggests recognition that which qualifications you have determines the level of success an individual can achieve.

Chapter 7 “We had to sell everything to prepare ourselves financially for access.”

Coping financially whilst on access

7:1 Survived on State Benefits whilst on access

Five of the respondents talked about how they supported themselves financially through a variety of State Benefits.

I survived *access* on Income Support, Family Allowance, Single Parent Allowance, Housing Benefit and free milk. [Jane]

I get Disability Living Allowance for my bad back, which is only £70 pounds. It isn't enough, but it helps. (Jenny)

I am surviving *access* on Job Seeker's Allowance and through scheming and lying. (James)

Daniel and Simon talked about how they survived *access* on Benefits.

For the most part my income has been fairly steady around £50.00 a week giro benefits. So my income at present is £200.00 a month and has been since September. (Daniel)

Well I'm mostly on the Job Seeker's Allowance so that's my only financial support at all. No other means with which I could support myself. (Simon)

These individuals found it a struggle because, as mature students, they had a range of commitments such as running a family household, which would have placed considerable financial pressure on them to make ends meet whilst completing this course.

These individuals also felt excluded, because the lack of money restricted them from being able to fully experience student life. Whilst not being able to participate socially is not such an issue, the implications for the academic experience are

important. Jane recalled how she could not attend Sociology trips because of the cost.

I could not go on Sociology trips because of the cost. It would have financially crippled me if I had gone on a three-day experience with Sociology. Just for the transport down and the hotel it was about £150 or perhaps even more. And then you needed spending money and the like. It would have been a fantastic experience as far as Sociology was concerned, but I could not afford it because of the cost. [Jane]

She also talked about not being able to buy books.

One of the biggest problem I had on access was not being able to buy any books, I could not afford them. Any books that I had bought I had done last summer whilst I was working. (Jane)

The problem here is that this respondent and others in a similar position are marginalised within the educational environment because they cannot undertake the same academic activities as their peers. Recognition of these difficulties was shown at College B, which provided financial support to James and Jenny whilst they were full-time students to help them with buying books and travel costs.

It was a nice con last year, because when I started full time the College would contribute towards my book costs and provide me with a Travel Allowance. When I went part-time I lost that entitlement. (James)

Whilst this form of financial support is most welcome the research discovered no other similar schemes in operation, and when James and Jenny reverted to the part-time mode they could no longer use this facility,

The financial difficulties facing the respondents on Benefits are further emphasised when Daniel recalled that if he worked whilst on *access*, his Benefits would be reduced.

It's a contradiction and it wasn't in my best interest. If I earned £20.00 in a factory in a day it would be taken off my State benefits. Now what is the point of me being in a factory for that many hours earning £20.00 when my benefits would be reduced accordingly. That's realistic that's how it really is surviving *access* on benefits. (Daniel)

It is understandable that Daniel and possibly the other respondents who received benefits did not work because they would not be better off financially. There was also the concern that their academic work would have suffered because of their work commitments. It could be argued that these individuals should not start *access* until they can properly support themselves financially. However, this view would contradict the principles behind this course, which are:

...about removing educational disadvantage which is both a result of economic and social disadvantage and a cause of it. (Woodrow 1993, p.2).

When locating the respondents' experiences within the principles behind *access* there clearly seems to be some contradiction, which raises the question whether these beliefs are tokenistic when put into practice. If anything, the additional financial pressure may have resulted in the respondents considering giving up this programme of study, which respondents such as Daniel and James had considered. Alternatively, this small amount of money may have prompted respondents such as Daniel to look to their partner or family for financial help. What these respondents show is that they are prepared to take a big gamble with their lives. They are prepared to undertake further financial strain because they identified their return to education as an opportunity to better themselves.

7:1:1 Little support from the Job Centre

Little support from the Job Centre was also part of the respondents' experiences, those who were supporting themselves on *access* through State Benefits. James

recalled when he was given the impression from Job Centre officers that he would have to quit this course, if he did not agree to look for full-time work.

I was told that I had to be prepared to throw in the course if they find me a job and all things like that. So every two weeks I'm going to the Job Centre with a load of jobs I've applied for. I would tell them that I have applied for this and that. It was just like me lying my way through things. (James)

Daniel and Simon recalled a similar experience.

I am only in receipt of benefit because administratively I am theoretically available for full time employment; this is because I only attend college 14 hours a week. Realistically that is impossible for me to find full time employment because of my college commitments. (Daniel)

At the beginning the Job Centre were not keen. But now they seemed to be quite prepared for me to take the six years to complete a part time course. So there's no worries at all, they're just quite happy with what I m doing right now. (Simon)

This lack of support clearly does not encourage the respondents because they constantly face the prospect of having their Benefits cut. The response of these Job Centres is clearly an additional barrier, which the respondents have to consider when deciding on their return to education. This attitude suggests that this Government Agency is not interested in what job the respondents gained, as long as it was full time employment. James interpreted the Job Centre's negative behaviour as holding him back.

I don't know. It feels like you're trying to better yourself and there trying to drag you down, do you know what I mean? It just seems, I don't know it just doesn't seem right. (James)

If this is the case, it is somewhat contradictory, as obtaining a qualification would probably increase the chances of full-time employment and an increased income. This would obviously reduce the chance of these respondents then looking to State

Benefits as a source of financial support. As these respondents were never in this position it seems they were fortunate enough to come across a Job Centre that was flexible in its interpretation of the Job Seekers' Allowance rules which was the main State Benefit these participants received. Daniel recalled how he had come to an understanding with his Job Centre.

Over the last few months they are aware of my situation and they have not hassled me at all on the understanding that when I complete on 26th June 1998 that I'm looking for full time employment. (Daniel)

To survive *access* the respondents may have to enter an unofficial agreement, that they would find full-time employment once this course had finished. So it seems that some Job Centres recognised the value of gaining qualifications, but it is more by luck than any other reason that these individuals stumbled across a sympathetic local Government Agency.

It is a hassle really, it's like an extra pressure. You might have your money suspended and stopped. It is like you trying to revise and your going to the Job Centre, and you're getting loads of hassle. It's not positive. (James)

This additional pressure does not help the respondents to concentrate on their studies, which suggests that there is a danger that they might not be able reach their full potential.

To cope with this lack of support the respondents talked about developing various coping strategies. James recalled asking *access* staff to lie about his whereabouts if the Job Centre contacted any of them.

I remember asking my *access* manager that if the Job Centre phoned, could you be as vague as possible, and tell them that you don't know where I am. (James)

Daniel talked about signing a contract, which committed him to finding employment.

I had to sign a contract saying I would find full time employment during the evening hours doing night time shifts. All hours outside my academic year. (Daniel)

Whatever strategy the respondents adopted to survive *access*, it is clearly a constant up hill struggle for these individuals. The main concern here is that the financial difficulties they experienced may not encourage them to further their education because they do not want to experience similar problems. When considering the issue of increasing *access* to either further or higher education, it is important for educators to consider that there are numerous barriers that the individuals have to overcome when they decide to return and progress with their education. If *access* is to meet its founding principles, such as providing educational opportunities for those who are economically disadvantaged, there is a need to provide financial assistance to help individuals who decide to enrol on *access* to achieve this goal.

With me having to constantly lie my way through everything, I begin to question whether the Government are committed to education being the centre of their education policies. (James)

The financial difficulties the respondents faced may result in the very people in which *access* was designed for, being excluded.

7:2 Financial support from their parents and partner.

7:2:1 Mother and father provided financial support

It was mainly the respondent's mother and father that supported their offspring financially whilst on *access*. Norman talked about how his father gave him money.

If I've ever wanted anything and if I'm having a particularly hard week and I need a bus pass or something my old man will spot me the cash. (Norman)

Daniel recalled similar support from his mother.

Yes, but with discretion. I have a car, which I have needed to keep on the road for all my voluntary work and various activities. That to the most part has been funded by or directly by my mother. She's paid for things like road tax, insurance and maintenance of the car. (Daniel)

However, Simon talked about how his family could not help financially

Most of them are all in the same position as me. They're not in good financial situations, and those that are, are not that close to me. (Simon)

Those respondents who can turn to their parents or relatives for financial support are in a more advantageous position than the individuals that cannot. The main advantage is that parental support can clearly help the respondents to meet their general living costs, therefore, helping them to fully experience student life. This feeling of greater financial security can, therefore, help the respondents to focus on their studies and help them to reach their full potential. In particular instances the respondents had advantages, such as Jane's uncle buying her a computer to assist her studies. The significance of this type of financial support for *access* students, whether or not they are disabled is that it increases the chance of their achieving academic success. However, with some of the respondents, such as Simon, not being able to turn to their relatives for financial support, it suggests that there is a divide within the student body, between those who can and cannot turn to their family for help. The problem with this divide is that *access*, through no fault of its own, is potentially not helping all the individuals it was designed for to realise their educational potential. There is also the possibility that prospective students

may consider family financial support as a factor that determines whether or not they decide to return to education.

7:2:2 Partner provided financial support

The respondents also talked about their partners providing them with financial support when they needed it. Tom talked about how his wife working helped him to get through *access*.

[Respondent's partner] has just got her old job back that she had prior to coming to College. This is actually fantastic because of two things. It gets her out from under my feet and gets a load more extra money in, which means I don't have to work quite as hard to support ourselves whilst on *access*. This money will also help next year whilst I am doing a degree. (Tom)

Daniel recalled how his partner's income helped him to stay on *access*.

But living as a partnership with [partner] and her limited part time income has covered cost effects, as in bills that sort of thing, heating. (Daniel)

The value of the respondents' partners, which is clearly very similar to the value of others' parents, is that they provided them with the financial support that helped them to meet the everyday costs of living. These respondents turned to their partners because they felt it was part of their relationship to help each other out financially. It is also important to note that some of the respondents, such as Tom, identified the financial support from their partner, at this stage of their education, as a means to help him to progress onto Higher Education. Tom was probably identifying this stage of his educational experience as an opportunity to develop a financial basis which would allow him not to have similar worries when he progressed onto Higher Education. When exploring the respondents' experiences further, in particular for Daniel, limited funds created a strain on the relationships between himself, partner and his friends.

Yes it affected my relationship between myself and my partner. It also affected the relations with my friends because we could not afford to see them socially, because they were in full-time employment and I was not. (Daniel)

The change in relations between the respondent, his partner and friends is because he had to use any available funds to achieve his *access* qualification. The respondents, who are undertaking *access* whilst on State Benefits are, therefore, undertaking another gamble because they are risking the relations with their partner and friends to achieve this qualification. The relationships with others could, therefore, play an important role in helping an individual to decide whether to return or carry on with their education. Daniel highlighted the value of supportive parents and partner.

If it wasn't for my partner I wouldn't be able to do the *access* course. Because of my mother and partner pulling together their revenues and some cost efficiency I have been able to carry on with *access*. Both of them have made contributions around about £300 since September to help me out when I have needed money. (Daniel)

The combined financial support of partner and family has helped the respondent to complete *access*. This respondent's experience reinforces the point made previously, that a lack of money can act as a barrier towards returning back to the educational environment. Turning to either family or a partner suggests that the individual who is fortunate enough to have this option available to them are more likely to return to education and achieve success through courses such as *access*. This raises the question, what happens to those who cannot? In some instances, the lack of money is creating a barrier that is stopping individuals from achieving educational success through qualifications such as *access*.

7:3 Worked whilst on access

7:3:1 Worked to support themselves whilst on access

Two of the respondents talked about working to support themselves financially whilst on *access*. Norman supported himself through part-time bar work.

I end up with thirty quid a week through my bar work and seven pound a week bus pass. Through me working and the support of my parents I am able to be a student and survive *access*. (Norman)

Tom supported himself and his wife through running his own musical instrument restoration company.

We have supported ourselves through *access* via my own musical instrument restoration company, through restoring and cleaning organs which has kept me very busy. (Tom)

He also taught music as a private tutor and at the local church.

At my local church I taught the piano and how to sing to a range of people who wanted it. It was helpful because it helped to provide me with a regular income at times, which helped to pay the bills when needed. (Tom)

I also teach and am director of music at the Parish church here. which is a major job in professional music terms. [Local town] has a parish church and has a major musical set up. So that takes up an enormous amount of my time as well with College and the company and the teaching that goes on. (Tom)

Daniel further supports the view that you can work with his own experiences of *access*.

You can work part time. The majority of people on the course are either employed part time, or do voluntary work, or whatever their situation is, but those who do part time never end up doing more than 20 to 30 hours a week. (Daniel)

The respondents worked because they had no other choice if they wanted to support themselves whilst on *access*. These individuals may also have preferred to work because it gave them a degree of financial independence from their partners and family. The concern with working is that it would detrimentally affect their studies, because they would have less time to focus on their academic work. Both of these respondents provided different responses to this question. Norman found working did not really affect his studies.

No it has not really affected my studies. It's just been a part time job and a near enough part time course in one way or another. The help and stuff for my extra tuition more or less fits around it. I've got four or five nights a week free anyway so. (Norman)

Tom admitted that if he did not work, he could focus more on the course.

Yes I could have spent a lot more time and at times I have been juggling several things, several essays, several quotes, physically spending time in the workshops, physically spending time trying to get music together, trying to do some practice and practice is a non event for me. I haven't really learnt any new music the only new music I have learnt is read and that's not very professional. (Tom)

Norman probably found it easier to work than Tom because he was enrolled on an *access* programme part-time at College D, which gave him the time to do other things such as a job. This was in contrast to Tom, who was enrolled on an *access* full-time at college A and, therefore, did not have the same flexibility. The type of employment selected by the respondents also influenced the amount of time they could dedicate to their work. Norman's job, which was bar work, gave him more flexibility because he could mainly work in the evenings, therefore, focus on his academic work during the day. Whilst Tom's work required him to be available at various times during the day and it is understandable that he experienced considerable difficulty focussing on his academic work. This respondent managed to cope because he could rely on his wife, who was enrolled on the same *access* course.

There are all sorts of things happening during the week, but I sometimes having difficulty in making them because I have to work. This is why it is great having [respondent's wife] she can just explain it to me afterwards, which helps me to keep up. (Tom)

Tom was in a fortunate position because his wife acted as an academic safety net, which probably allowed him to keep up with his fellow students. She acted as a support tutor explaining missed work and providing help with assignments by sharing notes or reading essays. Without this support it is likely this respondent would not have completed *access* within one year and would have either failed or taken it over two years. If this had occurred, the respondent's career plans would have been hampered and it may even have deterred the individual from progressing with their education. So again, the issue of funding can clearly influence the student experience of *access*. The lack of available funding to assist the individual with their studies can act as a barrier, which can significantly influence the students' experience of this program of study.

7:3:2 Could not work whilst on access

When the respondents' experiences were explored further they talked about not being able to work whilst on *access*. These respondents identified five areas in which they could not work whilst on this course. Jane felt she could not work because of her responsibilities as a single parent.

My problems being that I am a single parent with [respondent's child] who is 4 and I don't have any family who live in [town] at all and I suppose I mean I'm really good now because I have finished College for the year. [Jane]

Jenny could not work because of her medical difficulties.

Not exactly, I haven't got what I want yet. I might be able to work once I get my back fixed. (Jenny)

She also talked about difficulty in working because of her home and course commitments.

No, I wouldn't have the time it's ridiculous. What about the time? What with other jobs around the house and the fact that I've always got my head in a book now, I just don't have the time at the minute to go to work. (Jenny)

Daniel could not work because his benefits would be cut.

The fact being on Job Seeker's Allowance which obviously means that you can't earn extra money. Legitimately, I have tried anyway and still can't do it. (Daniel)

James did not want to work because he wanted to focus on his studies.

It feels like you've got to work through my course that I don't think I would have coped with in all truth. I just would not have coped with it in all honesty. (James)

Daniel reinforced this view with his experience of *access*.

Because I have got more time for my course, so there's less stress and anxiety. If nothing else my grades have improved because I have been able to give more time to my course work. So it's made it more feasible and realistic doing the course in the first place. It's quite easy that I could have continued on the same path as I was in the first semester. (Daniel)

There are clearly numerous, interlinked, reasons why the respondents cannot work to support themselves whilst on *access*. This has identified barriers in place which may stop adults from being able to enter or experience the educational environment. It is noticeable that the respondents did not want to work because they wanted to focus on their studies, so as to give it their best shot. This is understandable as *access* is a one-year course and the respondent is studying after a long period of absence. Jenny supports this view with trying to study and work whilst on *access*.

So these people who manage to study and fit in a job as well as a house, I don't know how they managed it basically because I couldn't have done. I realised it was important to get the access qualification. (Jenny)

7:4 Additional funding for access

7:4:1 Applied to Local Authority for additional grants

When exploring the respondents' experiences they talked about how they sought out additional funding from their Local Educational Authority (L.E.A.) Four of the respondents provided very different experiences. Tom talked about his experience of applying for a discretionary grant to buy a computer:

I got the computer in the end but they did their absolute utmost to put me off. They kept on sending me the wrong forms and telling me to fill in bits that you don't need to fill in and asking for stupid trivial information which had no impact on any of the decision making. After about 12 forms and several months I got £1500 in three handy bit size chunks of £500. (Tom)

Jane recalled her experience of trying to apply to the same LEA for a similar grant.

I applied for the discretionary grant twice. I stated that I was dyslexic and provided them with all the information they required but it has been twice that I have been let down. [Jane]

Daniel highlighted the difficulty in gaining grants for Further Education.

I made enquiries yet again off my own back, about the possibility of a grant. It is very limited because it's Further Education and not Higher Education. (Daniel)

Simon recalled not being aware of any additional grants.

No. And I haven't heard of anybody that mentioned anything about additional grants. This is the thing, the information is not forthcoming on anything to do with the disabilities. (Simon)

These respondents provide many different experiences of trying to obtain additional funding from their LEA. It seems more luck than anything else that allows an individual to obtain any funds to help them with *access*. For individuals such as Tom this luck places them in a fortunate position, which possibly gives him an advantage over fellow disabled students who cannot obtain this form of grant. The difficulties Tom experienced in gaining this additional grant, and the problems Jane encountered, suggest that individuals who decide to carry on or return to education are not encouraged or supported. The experience of Daniel and Simon suggests that if the individual is not able to obtain a discretionary grant they would have to rely on more personal sources of funding, such as their own income and help from either a partner or family. The only benefit of these individuals investigating whether or not they can obtain additional funding was that they discovered the availability of an additional grant the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) - when they progressed onto Higher Education. Tom talked about his experience of trying to apply for this grant.

Whilst applying for the discretionary grant I was told that I could apply for the DSA if I went onto University. I have applied for it, but because my Local Authority has just installed a new computer system, they have told me that they do not know what is happening.
(Tom)

It is understandable that this respondent applied at this stage, because of the time taken to obtain and become familiar with his equipment. It seems bizarre that this LEA could not provide him with some appropriate information when applying for this grant. The availability of additional grants only to disabled students in Higher Education raises the question why this form of funding is not available to students who are enrolled on a course which is a pathway into Higher Education. The availability of support at this stage would lead to a much-improved educational experience and reduce the chances of the respondents playing "catch up" when they progress onto University. If anything, the respondent has always had to live

with their disability, therefore, the availability of the DSA when the student reaches University may not persuade them to stay within the prior educational environment. Therefore, if a disabled student cannot obtain additional funding to support them whilst enrolled on an *access* program, their educational experience is very much dependent on finding a College of Further Education which provides good facilities for dyslexic students. But, with these students relying on limited funds to support themselves, it is a possibility that they may not have this freedom of choice.

7:4:2 Applied to Local Charities for funding

Respondents also talked about applying to local charities for funding. Two respondents recalled two very different experiences of applying to local charities.

I did apply to a local charity called [Local Charity name], which is exclusive to [town] and its immediate area. It is for those who have resided in or been educated in [town] prior to FE or HE that are allowed to claim. (Tom)

Student Services brought to my attention that there are certain charities that you can make an application to. They gave me an application for a charity. (Daniel)

When their experiences were explored further they both encountered two different results. Tom recalled how his application was successful.

The thing is I knew everybody who sat on my committee, because some of them were in my choir. I applied for all the books for both [respondent's wife] and I, which came to about £400 with examination fees. I got all the money I applied for, which was brilliant because usually people don't get more than £100. (Tom)

In contrast Daniel was told that, even if he applied, he would be unsuccessful.

I was informed there and then "its only an application." They told me that the chances would be that I would be unsuccessful and in fact I was. (Daniel)

It was probably more luck and knowing the right people that resulted in Tom being successful with his charity application. These experiences of searching for additional funding show that to gain any extra money you probably have to scheme and take every opportunity available if you are to be successful. Again, the significance of gaining this additional funding is that it can help to provide a feeling of financial security, which may encourage the individual to carry on with their education. The lack of success in obtaining additional funding may result in dissuading an individual from entering or carrying on with their education through *access*, because they would view it as too much of an up-hill struggle.

7: 5 Discussion

When undertaking Grounded Theory analysis it is necessary to provide a substantive interpretation of the data, which suggests *access* students, whether or not they are dyslexic, will struggle financially whilst enrolled on this educational programme. The main problem that the respondents faced is that they do not have enough money to live on, irrespective of whether or not they are dyslexic, whilst enrolled on *access*. One of the major barriers was little support from Government Agencies to further their education via *access*. It seems that the respondents who relied on State Benefits were very much in a "Catch 22" situation. The main problem is the Job Seeker's Allowance, which was one of the benefits the respondents received. The conditions of this benefit required them to commit themselves to actively seek, and remain available, for work. Also, if they worked at all their benefits would be reduced accordingly, as Daniel highlighted within this chapter. It is, therefore, understandable that the respondents found difficulty at times focussing on their studies because of this problem. The Kennedy Report (FEFC, 1997) recognised this problem through urging the government to review the Job Seeker's Allowance.

The lack of government support to encourage adults, irrespective of disability, to return to education is reinforced through the limited additional funding, such as grants, available to support students enrolled on *access*. The problem with limited funding is that it can clearly act as a barrier, which would prevent some individuals returning to education. The Kennedy Report (FEFC, 1997) recognised the problem the respondents faced, when it stated that:

Some authorities make hardly any discretionary awards and only one in twenty students receives them. The amount an individual receives and what it covers, varies enormously from one Local Authority area to another. Some students, despite their financial need, do not receive an award at all. (p.68).

Only one out of the four respondents in this research obtained a discretionary grant and support from a local charity. This variation in the availability of additional funding was also discovered during the first stage of the research at one College of Further Education. One of its *access* courses acted as a Foundation programme for degree courses at the local University. The significance of this link was that the respondents who were enrolled on this programme also received financial support from their LEA. A possible way forward was advocated by the Kennedy Report (FEFC, 1997), which suggested that LEAs should operate within a set of national standards. This would provide a consistency in available funding to any mature student who wishes to return to education. And when considering a return to education, the knowledge of whether or not they would receive additional funding might help individuals to make more of an informed choice as to when to return to education.

Turning to the respondents' parents and partner, it is noticeable that a considerable strain is placed on these individuals. Daniel's experience placed in context what many of the respondents felt and further support comes from Tom, who talked about the strain of selling personal possessions to allow him and his wife to

prepare for *access*. Support for the strain on relationships with the respondents' parents and partner comes from Merrill and Mckie (1998) who discovered a similar picture from their research. Even though the individuals close to the respondent are not undertaking *access*, they are indirectly experiencing this program of study through how the respondents coped. These experiences may influence whether or not they carry on with their education. It is important to recognise that when an individual decides to return to education, it will clearly affect those close to them in some shape or form.

If the individual respondent is unable to rely on others, such as their family, for financial support it is likely that they will work to support themselves whilst enrolled on *access*. When the respondents considered work they were again in a "catch 22" situation. If these individuals worked, their Benefits would have been reduced accordingly, therefore, they would be no better off. More importantly, the concern here, which was raised by Tom, was that the need to work would affect their studies. Merrill and Mckie (1998) discovered that many respondents felt their studies had suffered because they had to work. As is shown here and within the research, what choice do some of the respondents have? They either work, or give up their studies, because they cannot support themselves whilst enrolled on *access*. Being paid enough money to make it worthwhile to work emerges as another part of the respondent experiences. Some of the participants decided not to work and rely on Benefits, if they were not better off as a result of it. This position is understandable because the employment opportunities available would be low paid un-skilled work, which would probably not provide the respondents with the financial security required. Whatever option these respondents decided on, whether it be work or not, it is likely they would struggle whilst working towards their *access* qualification.

Moving on to a formal interpretation, the data suggests that the lack of financial support can prevent students, whether or not they are dyslexic, from returning to education to better themselves. The financial difficulties these respondents talked about suggest that the very people for whom *access* was designed are being excluded. Support for this view came from one *access* co-ordinator's experience of this programme:

It certainly doesn't serve disadvantaged groups in the way that it was envisaged originally, as an alternative route. (Palfreman-Kay and Taylor 2000, p.50).

The financial difficulties which the respondents experienced suggest that this programme of study may be more accessible to individuals from traditional groups that would partake in education. Merrill and Mckie (1998) supported this view, when they cited the concern of one respondent they interviewed:

My overall view is that in the near future many mature students who for one reason or another didn't have good educational opportunities when they were younger will feel that University is not a viable option for them. The current situation I feel will worsen, thus denying ambitious, hardworking people the chance of success in a higher education. Male student studying for a BA and Qualified Teacher status. (Merrill and Mckie, 1998, p.7).

It is likely that dyslexic and non-dyslexic students would face similar barriers whilst on *access*. The Kennedy Report (FEFC, 1997) advocated the need for a funding system that helps disadvantaged students. This is clearly a step in the right direction, which would help disadvantaged groups, that *access* is aimed for, to overcome the barriers they face when trying to support themselves financially.

Turning to a cumulative explanation of the respondents' experiences of coping financially, the availability of money can clearly influence how far an individual can improve their life opportunities through education. The fundamental issue which faces the individual is that how much money one has will determine the

educational opportunities available. It is likely that the more money an individual student can rely on, the greater the chance that individual has in achieving their desired qualifications whether or not it is on an *access* programme. This obviously results in students who are quite capable of achieving academic success being excluded from achieving educational success because they cannot afford it. The problem with money being linked with education is that instead of being a tool for inclusion, it is helping to reinforce the negative attitudes that exist towards disabled people and other groups within society. Education can, therefore, be an environment which can help to create, maintain and foster the oppression various minority groups face within society.

The picture that emerges is that the respondents had great difficulty in coping financially whilst on *access*. The respondents are more likely to survive *access* financially if they are fortunate enough to receive support through their partners, parents, employment or government body such as a Job Centre or LEA helping them. Taking this development into consideration, it seems that *access* in certain circumstances is failing to attract the non-traditional groups it was designed to attract because these individuals, whether or not they are dyslexic, cannot afford to enter the access programme.

Chapter 8 “Dyslexia is a label I can use to explain all my difficulties within and outside education.”

Experiences of dyslexia whilst on access

8: 1 Experiences of the dyslexia assessment

8:1:1 Discovered dyslexia through different methods of assessment

These individuals were often assessed for dyslexia after a member of staff or a support tutor had referred them to each of the Colleges' Support Service. Four of the respondents recalled the assessment.

This was the only time, when I started access that I had been assessed to assess whether or not I was dyslexic, officially by an educational teacher. After the assessment I was told that I would be officially assessed at a later date. (Simon)

I sat in this very room and she asked me various sets of questions such as do you find X or do you find Y or Z and I said yes, yes and yes. She said you are giving absolutely classic signs of dyslexia. (Tom)

I went to see the dyslexia tutor and she did a test to see if I was dyslexic. The test just consisted of asking various questions and I presumed she just looked out for signs that I was dyslexic. At the end she basically said that from her opinion that I was dyslexic. (Jane)

[Support tutor] wrote and got this lady to come and do the test, to establish whether or not I was dyslexic. After the assessment she told me I was. (Jenny)

All these respondents were assessed “in-house” before they were referred to an Educational Psychologist to officially confirm whether or not they were dyslexic. The reason for the double assessment is the likely high cost of the Educational Psychologist's report. It is likely the high cost may have required each College to be reasonably sure that these respondents were dyslexic before they were sent to

an Educational Psychologist. Parker and West (1996) reinforce this view, with their research.

It costs two hundred pounds to have an assessment done, this is fine if that person is dyslexic as we can get the money back from the Further Education Funding Council, but if they are not dyslexic we can't. Therefore before I make that decision I need to be certain that it is a dyslexic problem and not an educational, social or cultural one. (p.231).

Whilst exploring the respondents' experiences they also talked about the high cost of the assessment as one of the reasons why they were assessed in-house at their respective Colleges. The internal assessment would indicate whether or not the College would get any money back from the Funding Council. Also, the time taken to arrange and conduct an external assessment was considerable for all the respondents. For example an, Educational Psychologist did not officially assess Simon until his course finished.

The value of the in-house assessment was that the respondents found out quickly whether or not they were dyslexic. After discovery it would enable the respondents to develop appropriate coping strategies, which, if anything, allowed them to keep up with their studies. Alternatively, the time taken for an appointment to be arranged with an Educational Psychologist suggests that these Colleges did not have the funds to pay for the assessment. This view was supported by some of the Support Tutors and respondents who took part in the main stage of the research. To an extent this is understandable because it would be Impossible for a college to determine who would need to be assessed before the start of each academic year.

Respondents James, Norman and Daniel talked about being assessed before they started *access*. They all provided different explanations about how their assessment

occurred. Daniel recalled approaching his local Dyslexia Association to be assessed.

I rang them up. I found them in a directory, found out whereabouts they were and I went down and made a personal visit. I found some leaflets in a rack outside their office and I took it away with me. After reading the material I rang them up and made an appointment. I went along and discussed with them what my concerns were and discussed with them the possibility of being dyslexic, the cost of assessment, the cost of tuition and from there booked an assessment, where I discovered I was dyslexic. (Daniel)

James remembered being assessed through his local Job Centre.

I actually went for the assessment, because my friend told me that if you are dyslexic you can get the green card and less hassle from the Job Centre. This was the initial reason why I went, I just wanted an easier time from the Job Centre. I wasn't interested in anything related to academia in the slightest. (James)

Norman recalled looking forward to his assessment at College D before he started *access*.

The one we did whilst I was at [College of Further Education] I have got no problem with. I was actually looking forward to this one, to see how smart I was and to find out what were my strengths and weaknesses. I really wanted to know what I am actually good at. (Norman)

The most important factor to emerge here was that all these respondents discovered they were dyslexic at different times of their lives and through different organisations such as Colleges or Job Centres. By establishing at various stages of their lives that they are dyslexic, it is important to consider the impact of this on the respondent's educational experiences when they started *access*. If anything, the respondents who were aware of their disability before they started *access* would have had an opportunity to develop effective strategies to help them to have a much-improved educational experience.

With at least being aware of my dyslexia before I started *access*, I was able to prepare myself for what to expect through talking to staff and making sure the promised support would be available. (Norman)

Whereas, confirmation of dyslexia just before *access* may result in the respondents having to play “catch up”, which would involve coming to terms with their disability and picking up on the basics that they had missed earlier within their education.

After being told that I was dyslexic, I was so shocked. I wondered what I was going to do. I felt that I would not be able to keep up with my work even with the promised support. (Jenny)

It seems that students, who are already aware of their dyslexia before they start *access*, are in a lot better position to achieve academic success. This is because they have the strategies in place, which will increase the chance of them achieving academic success straight away. Alternatively, respondents who discovered their dyslexia during *access* would face greater difficulties. This is because they would be coming to terms with their disability, and the support available, as well as trying to keep up with their studies. And, with *access* being a one-year course, it is likely that the students who discovered their dyslexia during their programme instead of beforehand, would be under considerable pressure with their current studies.

Again the question of cost emerged as part of the respondents' experiences. Daniel recalled how he managed to pay for his assessment:

To be honest with you I couldn't have had the assessment done if it wasn't for family support, especially my mother, who gave me the money to pay for the assessment. I may have eventually paid for the assessment myself by saving up because I was in work. It was just very costly the assessment, it amounted to £180.00. (Daniel)

The cost of a dyslexia assessment may act as a barrier that would stop individuals establishing whether or not they are disabled. Daniel reinforced this view with his difficulties in obtaining the money to pay for his assessment.

I am very sympathetic for those people who can't afford a simple assessment, which may result in them not discovering their disability. My concern is that without knowing that you are dyslexic you are restricted, which may result in you not being able to improve you. (Daniel)

The respondents may again be in a "catch 22" situation because they cannot establish whether or not they are dyslexic if they cannot afford the cost of the assessment. If they cannot turn to either their family or a partner to pay for their assessment, it is likely that individuals would have to rely on dyslexia being confirmed by a Support Tutor or a chance meeting with a knowledgeable lecturer, if discovery is to occur. The concern here is that if *access* is to realise the educational opportunities of the groups it was designed for, there is an emphasis on either the individual being aware of their difficulties and seeking help, or a chance meeting with an aware member of staff. If the individual does not meet any of these criteria, it is likely that they will not be able to achieve academic success, therefore, improve their life opportunities.

8:1:2 Mixed feelings about the assessment

When exploring the respondent experiences of their assessment by an Educational Psychologist, many recalled mixed feelings. Some of the respondents echoed negative feelings about the assessment process. Tom talked about being worried:

I must say I was quite worried about going to see the Educational Psychologist, that was quite worrying because I thought that it was going to be a whole series of Mensa tests. I was just worried about looking stupid in front of her and the test is quite unusual in some respects. You spell this word and this word, words I had never

dreamed of using and yes they were words that would be difficult to anybody. (Tom)

They also talked about poor experiences during the assessment.

I spelled all the words wrong. Fortunately I came out of there quite well bearing on the side that I am dyslexic and the cost was met by the College which was quite important. (Tom)

She did a spelling test and again that was really awful. I only had spelled two out of about twenty but they were very easy. The other words were ones that I had never used before and if I had tried to use that word I would have never been able to spell it. (Jane)

These individuals were possibly apprehensive about the assessment because they were concerned about appearing of low intelligence and, therefore, reliving earlier educational negative experiences.

After the assessment, the respondents displayed negative and positive feelings towards the official conformation of dyslexia. Jane recalled being depressed after the assessment.

After the dyslexia was confirmed I felt really down about it. It was like there were no ifs and buts anymore. I felt quite down about it and I actually took my time in accepting that I was dyslexic. (Jane)

Some of the other respondents recalled being pleased that their dyslexia was confirmed.

I am quite happy that I know that I am dyslexic because I know what the problem is. I am not thick. I just can't put things down on paper. I am quite happy that I have found out what the problem is and ways I can tackle dyslexia. (Jenny)

When I got the results it was a feeling of relief. Oh I am dyslexic, this is a label I can place on all of my disabilities, which provides an explanation as well. (James)

I think I was finally able to properly identify or at least feel that somebody was able to identify, that I was dyslexic after so many years of me asking whilst I was at school and College. (Daniel)

These different reactions to the confirmation of dyslexia suggest that some individuals, more than others, had accepted their disability. The official assessment was more of a rubber stamp than telling them anything new. The negative reaction was because of the fear that this respondent would experience the same negative labelling that she had already encountered from her family. Jane was probably concerned that confirmation of dyslexia would vindicate the lack of parental support towards her carrying on with her education. The positive reaction suggests that the respondents possibly viewed the discovery of dyslexia as a new start because it had provided them with a second chance. They had identified the assessment as the door to a new world.

8:2 Family reactions to dyslexia

Whilst exploring the respondents' experiences they talked about how their family reacted to their dyslexia. The respondents mainly talked about reactions from their parents and sister. Their experiences are grouped around the issue of a negative reaction to dyslexia.

These respondents' parents and members of their family possibly displayed a negative reaction to the possibility of these individuals being dyslexic because they had no knowledge or experience of this disability. Jenny, Tom and Jane recalled the negative experience of their parents' responses:

My mother always thought I was a bit slow at school and that was it. I didn't pay attention or I didn't do my homework, all the way through school. After the assessment at College, when I told my mother that I was dyslexic, she was upset. (Jenny)

He has got a persecution complex and he thought it was an insult, as I am sure a lot of people see it when they discover their dyslexia.

My father just sees dyslexia as an insult but I am quite willing to prove them wrong. (Tom)

My father, he basically said that if you are dyslexic you can't carry on with College and they don't cater for people like that. It was just such a negative reaction. (Jane)

It is understandable that the respondent's parents displayed a negative reaction, where would they have gained any knowledge or experience about this disability? As mentioned before, the only avenues would be the media, friends of the family or other dyslexic people who can either positively or negatively influence the representation of this disability. Obviously the danger here is that these experiences could shape or influence subsequent opinions such as the respondent's sisters or brothers, as well as other relatives. This is reflected through Simon recalling how his sister displayed little understanding of dyslexia.

She didn't seem to understand that I had a lot of problems. That I am not fast at writing and I am generally slow. The thing is she has never been to University but she enjoys education and she has done a few A levels. She would love to go to University and she finds learning quite easy. At times I feel that she does not really understand the difficulties I experience. (Simon)

The problem with parents and other members of the family displaying no knowledge of dyslexia is that it contributes towards the individual feeling isolated from their own family, as well as from others in wider society.

The respondents' families may have reacted negatively because their previous thoughts on the individual's level of academic ability have been proven wrong. It is likely that the respondent's family possibly viewed the individual as lazy, until their dyslexia was identified, as James recalled.

Before I discovered that I was dyslexic my family always thought that I was lazy, but after I found out that they were so surprised that I had an explanation for my previous difficulties at school. (James)

The value of discovering dyslexia provides a label for the respondent's family to understand these individuals in more of a positive light, which can contribute towards the respondents feeling less on their own. Just as important, family support could encourage the individual to return to education and to seek other support for their studies.

These negative reactions can alternatively act as a prompt to encourage the respondents to continue with their education.

If my dad had gone 'you poor thing!' I think perhaps I would have quit College. He was really negative and I felt really angry and I thought "right you bastard, I will show you." I think the negative parental reaction gave me the initial boot to keep on going. But now I have gone back to the thought that I am doing my education for myself. (Jane)

So, on a more positive note, negative parental reaction could, at times, act as a tool to motivate individuals because they want to prove their parents wrong. This approach suggests that the respondents had more confidence in their own academic abilities than did their parents, which probably created a divide between the respondents and their parents.

The negative reactions of the respondents' families may be explained by a lack of knowledge or understanding about dyslexia. Jane's mother supports this view after she discovered that her daughter was dyslexic.

When I told my mother that I was dyslexic, her first reaction was 'why have they only picked it up now, why didn't they pick it up in school?' She just could not understand why. (Jane)

This respondent's mother clearly feels "let down" by the educational system because she cannot understand why Jane's teachers or lecturers had not recognised her dyslexia earlier in her life. Jane's mother questioning why dyslexia had not

been discovered earlier shows the power assigned to this group of professionals by lay people, because they have the ability to determine the educational opportunities available to dyslexic and non-dyslexic students.

8:3 Reaction of *access* staff to the respondent's dyslexia

When exploring the respondents' experiences, they also talked about the reaction of *access* staff to their dyslexia. Staff reaction, which could be either positive or negative, appeared very much dependent on the individual lecturer and varied within and between each College.

Positive reactions by *access* staff: the majority of the respondents recalled one or more academics displaying a supportive attitude towards dyslexia. Norman recalled the supportive attitude of his *access* tutor.

Yes they said it was no big deal. I was taken by the *access* tutor that interviewed me to find the Head of the Support Service. She was a woman with purple hair and I sat down and talked to her about my dyslexia. She said all the whys and wherefores and everything else about dyslexia, it was very useful. She took me by my hand and introduced me to all the other support tutors. (Norman)

The significance of taking this respondent to the support services is that it shows knowledge of the needs of dyslexic students. The effect on Norman is that it will help to create in him a positive feeling that he will be able to achieve academic success because his needs are being taken into consideration.

Daniel and Simon recalled the positive reaction of academic staff through providing individual support with their studies.

All my lecturers know about my dyslexia and one of my lecturers from [specific subject] has actually said to me that when I hand in assignments and they just fail I do not have to resubmit, but instead I can give an oral presentation. (Daniel)

Any student that he thought needed extra input he would actually stay with until they understand the topic. He also told us about there being a group for extra Maths tuition at the College, which was available to all students. (Simon)

[Access tutor] wasn't upset but kept me behind one day and said 'you should have told me you were dyslexic.' Because prior to that we had done a lot of writing and I think she would have made it easier for me, by providing me with pre printed handouts, which she did from the time after she had found out that I was dyslexic. (Jane)

These academics provided one to one support because they viewed it as part of good practice towards supporting non-traditional groups such as dyslexic students, helping them to getting used to studying again. The support provided by these academics is in addition to the help provided by College staff. They probably provided support through either "one to one" support or group tutorials. Such support is provided with the intention of encouraging the individual to overcome any difficulties they have with their studies. The effect of the combination of help from academic and from Learning Support staff is that it increases the chances of the student achieving success with their studies.

Jenny echoed a similar positive reaction, when she declared her dyslexia:

By the time I had come to terms with dyslexia, I had to explain to all the teachers why I haven't been to College and why I couldn't cope and that I had been diagnosed with dyslexia and I couldn't cope with it. I thought they would all be unhelpful, but they weren't, they were very nice. It wasn't like I thought. I thought it would be a really horrible experience. (Jenny)

It was noticeable that some of the respondents were surprised by the positive reaction of their tutors. Obviously Jenny was concerned that the negative experiences she encountered at school would be repeated when she moved onto College. Some staff were probably already aware of the needs of dyslexics because this group was viewed as part of the non-traditional group of students *access* was designed to attract. The positive reaction of staff helps the individual student to

believe that they will be able to achieve academically. This may result in them having a much-improved educational experience, which might make the difference between them achieving their qualification, or not. If anything, it may help to encourage the individual to carry on with their studies when they experience difficulties. This is particularly evident when comparing the respondents' experiences of education before and after they discovered their dyslexia. Jane recalled the effect of the positive support offered to her by one lecturer.

I think the lecturers who look on the positive side of dyslexia helps to put back the confidence into your abilities. I think they have all been really great with me. (Jane)

It is important to ask how these lecturers gained their knowledge of dyslexia. The lecturers' awareness of dyslexia could be attributed to a range of factors. One may be the previous experience these individuals gained from teaching dyslexic students on *access* or other College courses. Previous contact may have helped these lecturers to develop an understanding of the barriers facing disabled students. From this experience they are probably drawing upon previously used support strategies, which could possibly explain some of the individual support techniques which the respondents talked about. This explanation is likely, since all but one of the Colleges which participated in the second stage of the research had regular experience of dyslexic students enrolled on their *access* programmes. Alternatively these lecturers may have experienced an awareness-raising programme at their College, which introduced them to the characteristics of dyslexia and the barriers these people face within the educational environment. Some of the Support Tutors who were interviewed during the main stage of the research mentioned disability awareness courses, but they were not part of a rolling programme. The small size of the College may also help lecturers to gain knowledge of the Support Services available to disabled students, and of their

colleagues' experience of supporting dyslexic students. These methods of discovery seem more likely, Dewhurst (1995) discovered that academics were not provided with any specific training on dyslexia as part of their professional development.

Negative prior educational experiences can clearly act as a barrier which stops the respondents from "coming out" to their lecturers about their dyslexia, for fear of ridicule. Some respondents recalled individual lecturers displaying a negative reaction to their dyslexia. It is important again to remember that these respondents had already encountered positive experiences. Tom recalled one lecturer not wanting dyslexics to take her subject.

She wanted to get rid of us, but there was no way I was going to go. The way it was done was her telling you 'I don't think you can cope with this, go onto the AS Level,' which Jane did but I wasn't going to. I thought I might try the A level, but I now realise that it would be absolute madness, especially the working circumstances as well as having to work all hours god sends at times. It was difficult in that sense. (Tom)

This lecturer displayed a negative attitude towards dyslexia, perhaps because she had a prior negative experience of dyslexia. Support for this view comes from Tom, who provides an explanation for the negative lecturer actions he cited earlier.

I feel this particular lecturer has had bad experiences in the past with those who are dyslexic with not perhaps understanding what is required. (Tom)

Tom goes on to provide another reason why this lecturer may have displayed a negative attitude towards dyslexia:

She just didn't want anybody that would fail her subject. I think she was concerned about people being left behind, and I think she perceived dyslexics as being individuals who would be left behind. (Tom)

With previous experience, or lack of it, being the most likely explanation for a negative interpretation of dyslexia, it suggests a need to continually raise awareness of dyslexia and other disabilities within and outside the educational environment. Whilst not wanting students to fail is understandable, one should question why this lecturer thought dyslexics would not be able to cope? James provides one explanation.

The [subject] teacher said 'It is not a big problem [respondent] you will soon get round that.' In contrast my [another subject] teacher said my struggling to write an essay is nothing to do with dyslexia, it is just to do with numbers. Then you go to the [another subject] lesson and they say dyslexia is to do with the written word, word blindness and nothing to do with numbers. I feel like nobody seems to know what is happening. Its just seems strange that trained lecturers and teachers have no awareness of the disability. (James)

It is possible that the lecturer to whom Tom and James refer, displays a negative reaction to dyslexia because they do not actually understand what is dyslexia. The problem here is that through their own teaching experience they encounter one type of dyslexia and apply it, across the board, to other dyslexic students. This results in some dyslexic students, who fit the interpretation academics have of this disability, benefiting through appropriate support, whereas the student who does not fit loses out academically.

This negative picture of dyslexia suggests that having little or previous or no experience can play an important role when shaping individual lecturers' attitudes towards this disability. These encounters do create a worrying picture, because they show that at an Institutional and individual level there is limited (or no) understanding of dyslexia. At an Institutional level it seems there is no effective communication or links, such as screening or referral procedures, between the Support Services and lecturers. If there were, it is unlikely that James would have

encountered different interpretations of dyslexia at College B and he would have had a much more positive educational experience.

8: 4 Coming to terms with dyslexia

8:4:1 Unsure whether they wanted to be dyslexic

The respondents were the uncertain about whether they wanted to be dyslexic. Their experiences are grouped around four headings.

Shocked to be dyslexic.

It was a bit of a shock when you first hear about dyslexia. It takes a bit of time to adjust to that, but yes it is a relief, because now I know what my problem is. I always used to wonder what my difficulties were. (Simon)

At the end of the assessment I remember the Educational Psychologist telling me that I displayed the signs of dyslexia. I just remember feeling shocked after I heard the word. (Jenny)

These individuals were shocked to be dyslexic because they had thought there was no explanation for the difficulties they had encountered within the educational system. Instead of attributing their difficulties to dyslexia, the respondents possibly felt that they were just slow learners. The feeling of shock is reinforced at two levels. Firstly the respondents feel different to their peers, because of the dyslexia label. The difficulty here is that the discovery of dyslexia may help to isolate the respondent from their peers because they have no knowledge of dyslexia. Secondly, the discovery of dyslexia provides an explanation for the difficulties they have encountered earlier with their education. Through the appropriate explanation of dyslexia the respondents possibly feel that they can now achieve academic success, because they have a better idea of their strengths and weaknesses.

Feeling embarrassed about being dyslexic:

I was slightly embarrassed about being dyslexic because it seemed at that point an extremely embarrassing thing. At times I felt that with being dyslexic that I was a failure. (Tom)

It took about 2-3 weeks to accept that I was dyslexic. I don't know, it was almost like I didn't want dyslexia to be the excuse for why I couldn't read and write, because it was so embarrassing to admit this to lecturers, family and friends. (Jane)

These respondents felt embarrassed about the discovery of dyslexia because they thought it meant there is something wrong with them as individuals. These respondents felt embarrassed, because the confirmation of dyslexia reinforced their own feelings of being an academic failure. Tom and Jenny have learned this attitude, probably through the negative representation of dyslexia by academics, the media, fellow students and their parents. They also feel embarrassed because the discovery of dyslexia reinforces their feeling of difference between themselves and everybody else.

Feeling upset about being dyslexic.

I was upset for a couple of weeks that I was dyslexic. It was only until I got over this that I could sit myself down and think 'Ok you are dyslexic but don't worry about it, you can still do what you are doing,' I was just grumpy. (Jane)

Yes, I felt upset about being dyslexic. I felt that there would be a stigma in an academic situation, such as College or University, to somebody who is dyslexic and hence I was frightened. I think it was a quite a natural thing. (Tom)

These individuals were upset about discovering that they were dyslexic because they felt that their lives had been turned upside down through the discovery of this disability. Again they did not want to be dyslexic because they were worried about the negative representations of this disability and how it may affect them

whilst at College, as well as their relations with family and friends. There is also a realisation that dyslexia can act as a barrier, which prevents the individual from achieving academic success with their lives, because dyslexics are represented as individuals who have difficulties communicating with the written word. It is also noticeable that after the initial period of discovery the respondents have a much more positive attitude towards their dyslexia. This is possibly because they realise that they can access support and develop strategies to enable them to deal with the problems dyslexia creates.

The fourth heading was feeling angry about their belated discovery of being dyslexic.

If there are any feelings of anger or frustration it has been the time taken to discover that I was dyslexic. I realise that I have a condition that you could say is different from the norm. That doesn't bother me. I think I don't even know what normal is. I don't think any of us do, we only wish that we are and not to be labelled differently.
(Daniel)

Daniel felt angry because he feels that he had been let down by the educational system, through the failure of academics to recognise his dyslexia earlier and to provide appropriate support. Norman is also wondering why his dyslexia had not been discovered earlier within his educational experience and what might have happened to his life if his dyslexia had been discovered at an earlier stage. He felt that he would have achieved academic success earlier, if his dyslexia had been recognised. Norman, whilst being angry about the discovery of dyslexia, did not mind finding out because it provided him with an explanation for his difficulties. However, he is aware of the fact that his dyslexia will result in him being labelled as different, which can clearly have a positive or negative effect within his life.

These different reactions to dyslexia demonstrate the range of the respondents' reactions to the confirmation of this disability. Their reactions were mainly

negative, which suggests these individuals did not want to be dyslexic because they feared, as already mentioned, that they would stand out as different to their peers. These respondents also displayed negative feelings because they are wondering what would have happened to their lives if they had found out earlier.

It is also important to note that even when the respondents are aware of their dyslexia, they remained uncertain whether or not they would achieve academic success. This is understandable because it is likely that their self-confidence would be low and, therefore, they are tentative about looking to the future. Also these feelings of uncertainty display the respondents' lack of knowledge about dyslexia, which is understandable, because how would they know? The only way would be if they were fortunate enough to discover their dyslexia before *access*, therefore having the opportunity to becoming familiar with this disability and the way it affects them. If not, they would have to wait until their assessment before they received detailed information. The feedback provided by either the Support Tutor or Educational Psychologist about the assessment findings would be a starting point that could enable the respondents to progressively develop an understanding of their disability and the way it affects them.

After accepting they are dyslexic, the respondents seem to develop a more positive attitude towards their disability. Four of the respondents talked about being pleased that they discovered their dyslexia, because it provided an explanation for their difficulties:

It was a shock in one sense, but it is good to know that there is an explanation for my difficulties. It is better to be dyslexic than to be classified as stupid. (Tom)

When I initially told my mother I was dyslexic she was devastated, she kept saying 'perhaps I should have made you do better at school.' I was trying to explain to her it wouldn't have made any

difference, and in fact that it was better to have an explanation for my difficulties. (Jenny)

People would ask me 'why didn't you do this or that with your life?' I would tell them it is because I am dyslexic, and I would say I was happier to know that I was dyslexic, because it provided an explanation for the problem I had encountered in the past. (James)

Daniel talked about the discovery of dyslexia providing an explanation for his difficulties at school:

I could say that it gave me a peace of mind, the discovery of dyslexia. Once and for all that is why school was no good for me, that's why I wasn't capable of achieving academic success. It made me frustrated because nothing was done about it when I was at school. I felt that I had been let down by the education system. (Daniel)

He also mentioned that the discovery of dyslexia helped to develop an understanding of his capabilities:

The discovery of dyslexia gave me the peace of mind that allowed me to accept my condition so much easier and make allowances for it. Other people can make allowances because they have an understanding of why your spelling isn't that good and they perhaps support you. (Daniel)

There are many reasons why the respondents were pleased about their discovery of dyslexia, but one of the main reasons may be that they realised that the difficulties they had experienced earlier within their lives were not their fault. So instead of the respondents believing that they were not capable of achieving any academic success, it is likely that these individuals may now believe that they can achieve this goal. These respondents feel that they have a second chance with their lives because they have another opportunity to improve their life opportunities thanks to becoming aware of their dyslexia.

After the discovery of dyslexia, one needs to question whether or not these individuals would face new barriers? This is likely, because whilst having to

overcome the barriers they face because of dyslexia, these individuals may face new obstacles such as age hampering them from improving their lives. Instead of facing one barrier the participants could face multiple barriers, such as disability and age. Whilst discovery of dyslexia is often most welcome, the longer it takes to establish what the problems are, the longer the individual misses out on life changing opportunities such as important career opportunities. Younger dyslexic students have the time to get used to their dyslexia and can develop the strategies which will enable them to achieve academic success, therefore, improve career opportunities.

8:4:2 Lack of understanding about dyslexia

Whilst further exploring the respondents' experiences about coming to terms with dyslexia, they talked about the lack of understanding of this disability both within and outside the particular College at which they are studying at. Four of the respondents talked about the lack of understanding of dyslexia.

We once had a replacement English lecturer, who thought one student wasn't paying attention in his class. [Support Tutor] knew it was nothing to do with him not paying attention, but instead to do with his dyslexia because it affected his attention span. (Simon)

Another thing is that a lot of people do not understand what dyslexia is and they still have no idea what it means. The problem is my nephew has been to University and he was dyslexic and so he thought I wouldn't have any problems. Again they haven't got the understanding that there are degrees of dyslexia, which I didn't know because of the way it's talked about. (Simon)

In several places it doesn't do to tell various people that I am dyslexic, such as the kids that I teach at the local church and those of the local choir. It wouldn't do to tell their parents because their understanding of it would be limited. This is understandable because prior coming to College my understanding was very limited as well. (Tom)

I think there is an attitude and lack of understanding of dyslexia throughout society. If you say you are dyslexic, some people say 'that's ok and we don't mind.' This is the feeling I have got from people who I have met in and out of college. (James)

It is, important to establish why there is a limited knowledge of dyslexia. One reason why is because dyslexia does not fit into society's perception of disability (Riddick et al, 1997). This is because dyslexia, as with other hidden disabilities such as deafness and epilepsy, does not fit into society's perception of disability. Dyslexia is hidden, instead of a visible physical or sensory disability, which is more the accepted norm throughout society. Alternatively, there maybe a limited knowledge of dyslexia because it typically only affects an individual within specific contexts, such as the educational environment.

If any of these explanations are accepted as a reason for limited knowledge it is understandable why these respondents, in particular Tom, were cautious about being open about their disability. The concern would be that they would be treated differently (avoided, ridiculed or punished – like other disabled people) when non-disabled people discovered they were dyslexic.

8:5 Discussion

From the respondents' experiences of dyslexia whilst on *access*, following the principles of Grounded Theory, it is necessary to provide substantive, formal and culumative explanations of the interview data.

The variation in the knowledge of dyslexia between people in support services, lecturers and the respondents' families, helps to specifically make sense of the participants experiences of dyslexia whilst on *access*. The problem with this variation in knowledge is that it does not guarantee from one individual to the next, whether or not the respondent would have a positive experience of *access*. If individuals from the College Support Service, lecturer and the respondent's family

have knowledge of dyslexia, it increases the chance of the student receiving appropriate support (Riddick, 1996; Gilroy and Miles, 1996; Krupka and Klein, 1995).

It is now necessary to consider what this variation in knowledge meant for the dyslexic respondents. Starting with the Institutional Support Service, the dyslexia assessment emerged as an important part of the students' experience whether it is "in-house" or not. This is because it has the power to determine whether or not the individual is dyslexic, and therefore able to obtain the support they need to help them with their studies. As the dyslexia assessment is a tool to provide the individual with a second chance, there are already barriers in place that are preventing an individual from achieving this goal. One barrier that the respondents had to overcome was the cost of the dyslexia assessment. The problem of high cost is that it has the potential to stop an individual from finding out whether or not they are dyslexic, therefore excluding this non-traditional group from receiving support. The high cost has the potential to limit the number of people who are aware of their dyslexia throughout society, and therefore to limit the opportunities available to them to enhance their life opportunities. As already shown, Colleges have attempted to tackle this issue through providing "in-house" screening assessments, which are now part of Further and Higher Education (Cottrell, 1996; Riddick, 1997; NWPD, 1999; Gilroy and Miles, 1997) before referring the individual to an Educational Psychologist. However, it is important to recognise that the success of the in-house assessment is dependent on experienced and appropriately qualified staff, which on the whole was the case for all the Colleges apart from Institution B. It is likely that discovery of dyslexia will only occur for those who can afford to pay for the assessment, or who, are fortunate enough to select a knowledgeable staff and Institution.

By recognising that there is a variation in the knowledge of dyslexia, it raises the question whether Student Support Services are really helping the student, or their Institution? The research undertaken with Learning Support staff that aimed to provide an insight into the support available at each participating College would suggest these individuals are attempting to support dyslexic students instead of the earning funds of the Institution.

All I was told I had to do this year as far as the College was concerned was make sure I covered my own salary and those were my instructions and the rest of it really has been what I have chose to make out of it myself. My main aim has been to provide as much support I possibly can within existing financial constraints. (Learning Support Tutor, College E)

However, there was recognition that the cost of a dyslexia assessment has the potential to restrict staff from helping these individuals. This view is reflected through Tom's experience of being assessed.

I had an initial interview with...[Learning Support Tutor]...and she seemed to give me a thumbs up that I was certainly dyslexic. However, she told me that it could only be confirmed when money came through to get an official report. It took some time before such a report was issued. (Tom)

By highlighting the commitment of staff to help the student find out whether or not they are dyslexic, the problem seems to occur higher up within the Institutional structure or with the Funding Council itself. Within the Institution senior management are possibly restricting funding for external assessment because they either have limited (or no) funding in place to undertake external assessments. This concern is highlighted by Gilroy and Miles (1996), when they recognised that:

...a full assessment by a psychologist is expensive and there may be problems over funding it. Tutors at some Colleges are being asked to be as certain as possible that a student is dyslexic before sending him on to the psychologist. (Gilroy and Miles 1996,10).

One explanation for Colleges taking cost into consideration when providing an external assessment or not, is the funding requirements placed on them through the FEFC which makes:

...it a condition of funding for each College that it endeavours to enrol at least the same number and proportion of students with learning difficulties and / or disabilities as in the previous year. (98/02, p.4).

The difficulty in predicting the number of dyslexic students enrolling on College programmes from one year to the next may result in Institutions under estimating the number of dyslexic students, therefore not having enough funds in place to provide assessments. This system of funding therefore seems to favour students who are already aware of their dyslexia, instead of the respondents, such as Jenny and Tom, who became aware of their disability whilst on *access*. It is the way in which the FEFC provides funding to meet the needs of dyslexic students that creates the barrier which prevents an individual from being assessed externally for dyslexia. Funding has probably been provided in this way by the FEFC to permit them to quantify the amount of money required to meet the needs of dyslexic students. The difficulties facing Institutions, as well as support staff are that in attempting to meet the needs of dyslexic students they have to balance this requirement with the need to survive a competitive Further Educational market (Lucas and Mace, 1999).

In recognising the significance of the dyslexia assessment as providing a passport towards possible academic success, it is important to recognise the impact of Student Support Staff and College management. The success of the internal assessment is dependent on coming into contact with Support staff who have knowledge of dyslexia and who are able to recognise the characteristics displayed by the student. And, just as important there is also an emphasis on staff being qualified to undertake one of the many methods of assessment, whether it is the

Bangor Dyslexia Test (Miles, 1982 1997 & 1993), Dyslexia Adult Screening Test (DAST) (Nicolson and Fawcett, 1997) or an interview with a member of staff (NWPD, 1999).

The significance of coming into contact with a member of staff who can recognise dyslexia and provide an assessment is that it can help to empower the student through making them aware of their strengths and weaknesses as well as the support available. However, it is important to recognise that there is the potential for Support staff not to recognise dyslexia. Singleton et al (1998) highlights this issue, when they found many Universities relied on experienced and inexperienced staff through a variety of different methods of assessment, such as checklist or interview. Whilst this example highlights Higher Education, the research supported a similar picture of the position of dyslexic students within Further Education. The problem with using staff with varying levels of experience of dyslexia and different methods of assessment, is that an individual student may not discover they are dyslexic, therefore, be unable to gain the help needed to achieve academic success. This issue was reflected within the research, with one Support Tutor thinking a specific student was dyslexic, but her external assessment stating that she was not. The problem with this approach is that the confidence of the Support Tutor would be undermined in recognising dyslexia especially when cost of making assessments plays an important role in deciding when and how an individual will be assessed for dyslexia. The effect of this experience is that the Tutor is, perhaps, more reluctant, or thinks twice about making a referral to an Educational Psychologist, when they think a student is dyslexic.

Turning to the *access* programme itself, it is important to consider the impact of College staff in discovering whether or not the individual student is dyslexic. *Access* staff have the power to determine whether or not a student has a positive or negative experience of education through the discovery of this disability. *Access*

staff had possibly gained their knowledge of dyslexia through a range of prior experiences. This was reflected in the research, in Jane's experiences, who recalled staff telling her that they became aware of dyslexia through different methods such as teaching dyslexic students beforehand and knowledge of the Institution's support service available to this group. Recognition of this varied approach is displayed by Hurst (1999) who found that academics within post-Compulsory Education, who have not been required to undergo training on issues such as disability are likely to gain knowledge through prior experience. Furthermore, lecturers, who have no knowledge of dyslexia, are in a similar position to the students, who are also unaware of this disability and are, therefore, dependent on coming into contact with knowledgeable staff or students. If they do, it is likely that each lecturer may have varying degrees of knowledge, as reflected by James and other research (Hall and Tinklin, 1998).

Moving onto the family reaction to dyslexia, a negative reaction can act as a barrier that prevents the individual from achieving academic success. The respondents' families were displaying a negative reaction to this disability, perhaps because they had little knowledge of dyslexia. This is not surprising because how would they know about dyslexia unless they were fortunate enough to hear about it, before or during the respondent's experience of education? It seems that, if discovery is to occur, there is a dependence on coming into contact with knowledgeable teachers or lecturers who can present the discovery of dyslexia within a positive context, as reflected within this study and other research (Hall and Tinklin, 1998; Silver and Silver, 1998). The respondent's family would probably believe teachers or lecturers, because they are perceived as individuals who can provide an accurate assessment of academic ability. The positive representation of dyslexia by academics may also help to support the respondents' explanations of dyslexia. The respondent's family probably displayed a negative reaction because these individuals may not have recognised dyslexia as an actual

disability, therefore, viewed any explanation as an excuse (Riddick et al, 1997). This is possibly because the respondents recognise visible disabilities, such as a wheelchair user, as fitting more with their definition of disability.

There are a range of within-family factors that affect whether or not there will be a positive or a negative reaction to dyslexia. Some of these factors could be linked to family attitudes towards education in general and to their social class background. Turning to family attitudes to education, Riddick et al (1997) provides one explanation for the respondents encountering a mixed family attitude, which is that positive relationships occurred with some of the respondent's families, because they had a higher level of education, therefore, greater recognition of the mismatch between the child's reasoning abilities and literacy skills. She goes on to suggest that negative relationships occurred with the families who had a limited experience of education, and who, were apparently less likely to recognise their child's reasoning abilities and difficulties with literacy skills. The problem with this varied reaction is that family response can affect whether or not the individual decides to seek help with their studies or to further their education through programmes such as *access*.

Another within-family factor which may have influenced reactions to dyslexia is social class background. Riddick (1995) highlights the belief that dyslexia was a:

...term favoured by middle class parents who could not accept that their children were slow. (Riddick 1995, p.470).

It is therefore possible that dyslexic children from middle class backgrounds will have their disability recognised and appropriate support provided. White middle-class parents favour dyslexia - is it likely that dyslexia would not be recognised by working class families? Instead of recognising dyslexia would such families

interpret this explanation as an excuse for the failure to perform academically? However, Riddick (1995) shows that:

...there were no discernable differences between the views of working class and middle class parents on this issue. (p. 470).

It is possible to suggest that family reaction to dyslexia occurs irrespective of class. Whatever the family reaction is, the reaction of the respondent's family can influence how the individual interprets their dyslexia, whether it is interpreting their disability as "unproblematic" or "something of which to be ashamed. Scott et al (1992) had a similar view, when they found the dyslexic respondents identifying the support of their parents as critical in helping them to cope successfully with their difficulties.

A formal interpretation of the respondents' experiences of dyslexia is that the hidden nature of dyslexia itself contributes towards the variation in knowledge of this disability within society. The difficulty is that not everyone can tell whether or not an individual is dyslexic, and how it affects the person in their life's. The ability to meet an individual who has knowledge of dyslexia can make all the difference between whether or not a dyslexic person will receive appropriate support to help them reach their full potential. An element of chance comes into play, which is reflected in the majority of the respondents not discovering their dyslexia until they started *access*. This experience is hardly surprising as the respondents were benefiting from the greater commitment of support for students within Further Education, and the increased awareness of the needs of disabled students through both the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996) and the requirement on Colleges to produce Disability Statements [Disability Discrimination Act (1996)]. Furthermore, with the respondents only discovering their disability whilst on *access*, it suggests that a high proportion of people may not be aware of their dyslexia, therefore, unable to meet their full potential within their education or their career. Limited

knowledge of dyslexia could explain why there is partial discovery and recognition of this disability. Again the limited knowledge of dyslexia, whether it is at College or at home, could be explained by this disability not fitting with society's traditional interpretation which is more focussed on tangible disabilities. The varied knowledge of dyslexia can, therefore, reflect the wider position within society that dyslexia is not recognised as a disability. Riddick et al (1997) reported one participant's view that:

...people would be far more inclined to recognise his difficulties if he had a white stick or a guide dog. (p.44).

Dyslexia is not easily recognised within society because it is a hidden disability, therefore, it is hard to determine what type of support should be provided. This is because dyslexic people are perceived as no different to their non-dyslexic peers. For example, Lindesmith et al (1975) state:

... those they confront on a daily basis will 'appear to be normal.' They will walk normally, speak intelligently, not have sight or hearing impaired, have the usual level of physical stamina, and be able to follow the train of a normal conversation with relative ease. (p. 535).

The limited recognition of dyslexia within society suggests a need to change peoples' attitudes perhaps by education, that there are both hidden and visible disabilities within society.

Within education, each sector's (Compulsory, Further and Higher Education) approach towards supporting dyslexic students can contribute towards creating limited recognition. Whether this is through Statementing via LEAs at Compulsory Education level; or applying to the FEFC for funding to support dyslexics within Further Education; or individual grants such as the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and Institutional support to assist this group within Higher Education. The problem with these varied approaches is that dyslexic students, whether aware or

unaware of their disability, might not have their difficulties recognised or the appropriate support provided, in whatever sector they are studying.

It is now necessary to join the substantive and formal interpretations together into a general explanation this suggests that dyslexia is not readily recognised within society, whether it is within the educational environment or by family, partners and friends; because it is a hidden, instead of a visible, disability. The term dyslexia has emerged to explain why some individuals learn differently, and do not meet the educational expectations a person is expected to achieve within their life's. The label dyslexia, therefore, reflects the need of society to categorise people. However, the problem with this approach is that it is separating people out as different from each other. The consequence of this division is that the minority groups, such as dyslexic people, will be perceived as "different" to the majority and treated negatively because they differ from the norm. Whilst dyslexia provides an explanation for how an individual learns differently, it has the potential to create a divided society through the label it provides.

The picture that emerges is that there is limited knowledge of dyslexia and this affects the individual dyslexic within society. The lack of knowledge could probably be explained by dyslexia being a hidden instead of a visible disability, which places an emphasis on coming into contact with knowledgeable individuals who can recognise it and provide appropriate support. Such opportunities help to determine whether or not a dyslexic student will have a positive experience of education and of the wider society.

Chapter 9 “There are some nice people on access, who are willing to help each other.”

Experiences of relations with other students

9: 1 Experiences of studying with fellow students

9:1:1 Experiences of studying with mature students

The respondents talked about the relationships they formed with fellow students who studied the same subjects. The most significant factor to emerge was that the respondents formed closer relationships with fellow students.

Those who are on the same subject you tend to form better relationships with. This is simply because you are studying the same thing and you are talking about the same subject. Basically you're interested in their work as well as your own. (Simon)

In contrast the relationships with fellow students not studying the same subjects were more superficial.

Where as with other courses your interest isn't as deep so you don't form that much of a relationship unless they are in trouble with their subjects. (Simon)

It is more understandable that the respondents formed closer relations with individuals studying the same subjects because they have something more in common with each other. When exploring the respondents' experiences three areas emerged as important to studying with fellow students.

Collecting notes for each other:

We would phone each other up and say 'I'm not going to make it today can you make my excuses and get me the notes and handouts and drop them in on the way home.'(Jenny)

Yes but I think that goes for everybody, we would always collect notes for each other. If some one were absent the lecturers would

say 'You will see that such and such gets the notes that they missed, irrelevant if they were dyslexic.' (James)

I could always rely on my wife, who was doing the access course as well to collect notes for me if I missed any lectures because of my work commitments. (Tom)

I would say its common practice, if somebody doesn't attend. Say if photocopies are handed out, we will always take a copy for somebody else. We would photocopy all our work on request for the student who didn't attend. (Daniel)

That was one good thing about my fellow students because they would always collect notes for me if I asked them to. I could always rely on them. (Norman)

These experiences show that each respondent was treated no differently because of their disability, which suggests on certain occasions that dyslexia is not a barrier when forming relationships students. As mentioned before this could be because fellow students identified dyslexia as a similar barrier to those that they themselves have to overcome, therefore, they look to each other for support because they have something else in common. Alternatively, through their interaction with the respondents, they realise dyslexia does not hamper relationships.

Providing subject specific support to their peers.

I did help them out with this one essay, that I thought I had done really well on. I was telling them all what books to read. So that's how I would help. (Jenny)

There was camaraderie definitely between us all because we always helped one another out with work. I've lent work out and supported various individuals with essay writing, showing them work, allowing them to read through work of mine. (Daniel)

At the start this woman did not know what was happening in Sociology so I helped her out. I used to try and explain things in not too much depth, so she would not get confused. I always remember

her asking whether or not Karl Marx was one of the Marx brothers.
(James)

The respondents also talked about how fellow students helped them as well:

Yes, I should say especially in Maths! Everybody was grateful with the help that we provided each other in this subject. That is probably the best example because I only came across one person who was good at Maths. (Simon)

Oh all sorts of things. Everything from sitting down and providing each other with emotional support, to looking at work from an academic point of view. In particular, my wife was the best because she would cast her opinion over the whole piece of work. It was like having your own sort of mini lecturer and second brain on the case.
(Tom)

In IT I would have people type things in for me. Like the other week, you had a certain amount of information you had to type in before you could do the task. This girl typed the information in for me so it would build the speed side of it up. (James)

Yes, mainly in Sociology. One of the girls who did her *access* last year came back to take the A Level exam. She came over once or twice at the beginning of the course to explain things and give you notes from last year's course. She would just expand on what had already been taught. (Jane)

A friend of mine, who has just about completed one task in Information Technology, said he would make me a duplicate disk so I could submit the work. It's not a matter of wanting to cheat, but sort a show of support amongst students that we'll help one another out where we can, because time is limited. I've done that for others too. (Daniel)

These various experiences show that *access* students rely on each other to achieve academic success. The significance of relying on each other is that it suggests these individuals are prepared to adopt any strategies that would allow them to achieve this success. This helps to create a more inclusive educational environment because disabled and non-disabled students are working towards the same goals. This potentially may lead to an increased knowledge and awareness of dyslexia by non-

disabled students, which could help towards tackling the obstacles disabled people face, both within and outside the educational environment. These experiences also suggest that, in certain instances, dyslexic students are better at some subjects, or specific parts of them, than their non-disabled peers, which shows that they are capable of providing academic support.

The third area that the respondents talked about was fellow students providing general support and encouragement. Three of the respondents felt that this positive approach from their peers encouraged them to stick with *access*.

Yes you do get people who get disheartened and find it very frustrating and even difficult after 10, 20 years of coming back into education. The motivation from fellow students on the same course helps because it encourages you to stay, because we are there for the same reason. So my motivation and that of others helps to keep you going. (Daniel)

I felt very easy amongst my fellow students. Yes, definitely, I think there was a bond that helped me to stay on the course when things got tough. (Tom)

Yes! They would say 'oh you've got this far you can't give up now you've got to keep up with it.' The *access* co-ordinator also said 'you know you've got this far now you don't want to leave it now!'(Jenny)

The respondents experienced this form of support because, irrespective of their disability, their peers realise that a return to education would be a struggle. Therefore, disabled and non-disabled students are providing each other with encouragement to help them overcome the barriers they would face on their return to education. Alternatively, the support occurred because *access* students are looking to achieve the same goal, therefore, encouragement is provided as a matter of course:

We supported each other because we've all got the same aim in life, even though some of them have gone off to do midwifery, nursing.

We've all got the same goal, we all want that extra bit of paper which will lead to our *access* qualification. (Jenny)

Yeah, yeah if you're bad at one subject and you just want help you can always go to your fellow students for support. We are all in the same boat, so sometimes it helps. (Simon)

The need to achieve the *access* qualification helps to create a feeling of unity between *access* students. It is noticeable from Jenny that the level of support you can expect from your peers is very much dependent on your mode of study.

You don't really get the same support from your peers whilst enrolled on the course part-time. On the full-time course everybody mucked in together. If you were sick you would phone one of them up and they would keep the notes for you. But whilst I have been part-time there has been no phone number swapping. You're sort of left on your own. I suppose it is understandable because everyone has commitments. (Jenny)

It is understandable that this respondent felt isolated through the part-time route because it is designed more for individuals who have outside commitments and are only interested in the academic experiences that *access* can provide.

9:1:2 Experiences of studying with non-mature students

When exploring the respondent experiences they also talked about studying with non-mature students. The most significant characteristic to emerge was a divide between these two groups which was based around the respondents having more life experiences than their peers.

Mature students are more kind of understanding and obviously have more life experiences than my younger colleagues. I mean I do my English with 16 and 17 year olds. I kind of like their ideas, but they are very limited and they mess around in lectures, which does not help when you are trying to work because you lose your concentration. (Jane)

I think they haven't got the experience of life, the outside world. They don't know what it's really like to be on the outside because they have their parents at home to support them and they rely on them. (Jenny)

For English some of the 19 year olds that I study with can't relate to the texts that we are being taught because they do not have the life experience. (Tom)

This difference in life experiences occurs because the non-mature students are younger than their fellow *access* students. It is also understandable that a difference would occur because both sets of students would have different educational priorities being at different stages of their lives. If anything, non-mature students would be looking at their experience of education as the first opportunity to achieve academic success. Whereas, mature students would be looking at their return to education as another chance to gain academic success. The problem here is that this difference may result in little understanding of the needs of both groups within or outside the educational environment, which potentially may influence the level of disability awareness. To an extent this is shown through Norman's feelings towards the non-mature students he came into contact with in his English group:

I've got no time for them. I'm really not interested in getting to know them because they are not here to learn, but instead to just have a laugh, which does not help when you are trying to study. (Norman)

The danger here is that these negative attitudes, which may be well founded or not, could potentially influence the level of dyslexia awareness within and outside the educational environment. This occurs through academics having the potential to shape a positive or negative image of dyslexia through the portrayal of the disability to fellow academics, students and the respondent's family. This particular concern seems to be very much dependent on how a mature student would react to studying with a non-mature student, because some of the

respondents identified advantages of studying with this group. Jenny preferred working with non-mature students when she used a computer:

Yes I do not like studying with non-mature students except for when it comes to computers. I think the younger students find it easier to get on with computers. The older you are, you don't get on with them very well. They're not afraid of making mistakes, whereas you're older and you do, you worry about making a mistake. And they don't. I've found that sometimes when I've been in the IT workshops and something has gone wrong I can turn to one of the younger students and they will help me. I do not think I would do that for subjects such as Sociology and Psychology. (Jenny)

Tom also saw an advantage of studying with non-mature students.

I think it's good for the access students to study with the younger ones. This is because the 19-20 year olds do not have any understanding of the literature that speaks of marriage and of having children. It speaks of life which through no fault of their own, they have not experienced. So you can help them to develop an understanding of what life might be like. (Tom)

The advantage of studying with mature and non-mature students, in particular circumstances, is that both learn from each other, which may help both groups in achieving academic success. The significance of such an approach is that it creates an inclusive environment which helps to raise awareness of the needs of both groups, and which may lead to a greater understanding of the needs of disabled people within and outside the educational environment.

9:2 Experiences of relations with disabled students

9:2:1 Meeting other dyslexic students whilst on access

Nearly all the respondents talked about coming into contact with other dyslexic students whilst at College. They focussed on coming into contact with these individuals within both a pastoral and academic context. When exploring the respondents' pastoral encounters, they felt fellow dyslexic students provided them

with encouragement and support. Tom recalled how one fellow dyslexic student supported him by listening:

When she's listening to you in a compassionate manner she is brilliant, absolutely brilliant. There's a lot to be said for that because it has provided me with support and encouragement when I have needed it. (Tom)

Simon remembered how he and another dyslexic student helped each other out.

We helped each other as much as possible. He has asked me for advice on his work and I would do the same thing. He would also ask me advice on getting a place at University. We would just help each other out as much as possible. (Simon)

Jane talked about how she would listen to a fellow dyslexic.

I think one of the greatest things I do for [fellow dyslexic] is listen to him when he is stressed out with his work. I think I help him to sort out the difficulties he faces with his work. (Jane)

There are various ways in which the respondents provide pastoral support to these individuals. These different forms of support reflect the different ways in which they come into contact with fellow dyslexics. Tom and Jane were undertaking the same *access* course, therefore, it is understandable that both of them listened to each other because they probably faced similar barriers and could identify with each other. Whereas Simon provided more general support, perhaps because he was not able to fully identify with the individuals' needs because they were not studying together. Therefore, providing advice on getting a place at University would be more appropriate support. Through the participants coming into contact with fellow dyslexics, they realise these individuals have similar goals, which helps them to form a common bond.

You have common goals, common problems, a common disability, or should I say similar disabilities. And so you can understand where one is coming from and you can relate to one another because you

are facing similar difficulties. You also don't feel like you going to be judged. (Daniel)

Jane reinforced this view:

I think the dyslexia has helped because we have both got something in common because it is likely that we will face similar difficulties within and outside college. (Jane)

Because dyslexia helps to create a common identity between the respondents and fellow students it resulted in the individuals forming friendships, as the respondents recalled:

With obviously [dyslexic student] yes, him and I have become really good friends as the course has progressed over the months. It is good that I can turn to someone who is facing similar difficulties. I have also become friends with other disabled students at the college. (Jane)

Him and I have developed a good friendship. I understand how he felt and how he was able to work with it. So I think, yes, I've sort of bonded a bit more now, the fact that I have found his problems are the same to mine. (Jenny)

Yes definitely myself and [dyslexic student] are good friends. I don't particularly believe that [dyslexic student] and I and [respondent wife] would have been great friends if it wasn't for dyslexia. (Tom)

The significant factor to emerge here is that dyslexia is allowing the respondent to form a friendship with a total stranger, which may not have occurred if it was not for the disability. It is likely the support they provide is no different to what the respondents would provide to their non-disabled peers or what this group would provide to fellow non-disabled students. Because of the dyslexia the respondents could meet new people, therefore expanding on the number of friends that they have. However, the success in meeting new people is dependent on the individual's perception of dyslexia, because either a positive or negative interpretation could determine whether or not the individual would gain or lose

friends.

Respondents recalled how they provided academic support to each other. Simon remembered how he and another student helped each other to attend their classes.

We more or less generally supported each other whilst at College. He would have not always understood what was asked and he would not remember what day it was, so I would point him in the right direction. He would also do the same for me when I had a bad day. (Simon)

Tom recalled how he and his wife provided one dyslexic student with support.

[Respondent's wife] and I helped her with various essays all the time because we thought it would be of use. It helped her with some of the essays, but not others. (Tom)

Simon talked about how he would help a fellow dyslexic with his essays:

I would help [fellow dyslexic] as much as I could with his assignments. It would be me trying to remember as much as I could from my support sessions on how to write essays. I think he found them useful. (Simon)

The respondents supported fellow dyslexics because they identified with the academic difficulties these individuals would face. They may have provided this help because they wanted to develop confidence in their own and fellow dyslexics' academic abilities. Through this support they are developing their own knowledge and understanding of dyslexia, within and outside the educational environment.

9:2:2 Awareness of other disabled students whilst at college

Whilst investigating the respondents' experiences they talked about meeting other disabled students throughout the College. Three of the respondents recalled coming into contact with other disabled students through the Support Services such as the Support Unit.

I remember meeting [fellow dyslexic] for the first time when I was attending the study skills session at the support unit. It was so good to meet a fellow dyslexic for the first time. (Tom)

Daniel supported this view with his experience of a Support Unit.

There was a mature student, a mother. She is physically impaired and it was about six or seven weeks ago that I remember her telling me in [support unit] that she was dyslexic. I also told her at the same time that I was dyslexic. (Daniel)

He goes onto say that he meets a range of disabled students at this Support Unit.

Only through [Support Unit] do I notice how many disabled students are attending this College. I suppose it depends on what you class as a disability, but I think there are a lot of students with a learning disability. (Daniel)

Norman further supports this view with his experiences.

The other dyslexic people I don't really have too much in common with them. They are all sort of 16 year olds. There's a girl called Jo who is in the English Group, GCSE group and she's with [Support Tutor] on Thursday mornings. I don't find anything in common with the other dyslexics who come to the Support Unit because there is no common ground between them and access students. (Norman)

The Support Unit provides a forum, which potentially allows disabled students to meet and come together. The significance of this is that it may help these individuals to feel that they are not alone within the educational environment. It has already been shown this may lead to the respondents forming friendships between themselves and other dyslexic students. The knowledge that other students are seeking help from a Support Unit may result in encouraging the respondent to look for help without fearing that they will stand out as someone different. When investigating the respondents' experiences further, one of the Colleges seemed to be adopting more of an inclusive approach than the other Institutions.

There are two or three individuals who are actually on my particular *access* course, who are not disabled, but who go to [Support Unit] and get extra English. There are also several individuals who constantly receive extra Maths support. (Daniel)

The significance of this approach was that it helped the respondent to feel no different to their non-disabled peers. If anything this approach may help to challenge the negative stereotypes disabled students face within and outside the educational environment. This support provision may also help to increase awareness of the needs of this particular group throughout the student body and among academic staff.

9:3 Experiences of dyslexia and fellow students

9:3:1 Has not told others that they are dyslexic

Four of the respondents recalled difficulty in disclosing their dyslexia to fellow students:

Not told others because they thought they would be treated differently.

I just think it doesn't really concern them. However, because of my dyslexia, I don't want them to think of me any differently than any body else who is studying for *access*. (Norman)

I felt different from my fellow students to begin with really when I discovered that I was dyslexic. At the start I just did not want to go to College to start off with because I felt different. (Jenny)

At the time I discovered I was dyslexic I remembered my school experiences, when I was told you were thick and stupid, which made me feel different. All these memories came flooding back to me. (Jane)

Jane goes onto to provide a particular context in which she would feel different.

I think at College the only way I feel different whilst at College is because I get more support than my non-dyslexic colleagues. I've

seen students who aren't dyslexic really struggle and I think poor things, which makes me feel guilty. (Jane)

Embarrassed about being dyslexic:

I was really embarrassed about being dyslexic. I think it would have been worse actually if I was the only person with it on the course, but meeting [fellow dyslexic] helped. (Jane)

Jenny supports this view when she discovered that she was dyslexic:

I was at the start really embarrassed about being dyslexic. This was because when I was a kid I had some really bad experiences, where I was always thought of being backwards or something. (Jenny)

Feels there is a lack of understanding about dyslexia:

I find that most people don't have an understanding of dyslexia and what it means for the individual. I am wary of disclosing my disability because I am concerned how I would be labelled. (Daniel)

Norman remembered not disclosing his dyslexia readily to his peers because he feared that he would be labelled.

I do not want to tell my fellow students that I am dyslexic because I am worried that they will label me as someone who has a problem, which may result in my losing out. (Norman)

Jenny suggested that she did not automatically disclose her disability to fellow students because she felt their experiences of another dyslexic might cloud their judgement.

I met another dyslexic when I started the access. And he's the most obnoxious person I have ever met. Every excuse he got came down to the fact that he was dyslexic. My god, he's always using that excuse, always using his dyslexia. (Jenny)

There are numerous and multiple reasons, which are very much dependent on the individual, why the respondents decided not to disclose their dyslexia to fellow students. These individuals did not want to disclose their disability because of the

concern that their peers would treat them differently, which was reflected throughout the research. Because of previous negative encounters, the respondents are possibly concerned that if their disability were disclosed they would be isolated or excluded within the student body. This may result, in certain circumstances, in the respondent dropping out when they encounter difficulties within the educational environment. When exploring the respondent experiences further it seems to be a "Catch 22" situation, because some of the respondents felt isolated from the student body:

Whether you decide to tell your fellow students or not, I think you will stand out just as much, with those who have an opinion or misunderstanding about you as an individual and your abilities. So, in one respect, you cannot win. (Daniel)

The decision to disclose dyslexia to fellow students is very much dependent on the individual's experience of this disability. The danger here is that dyslexics may exclude themselves from the student body because their peers feel they do not have similar personal experiences, which may not result in the feeling of unity developing between *access* students. The "knock on" effect may lead to students not providing each other with academic and social support, which would obviously influence the student experience of *access*. So, in one respect, the respondents cannot win and the decision whether or not to disclose their dyslexia is probably more down to chance than any other factor. To overcome these obstacles, there is an emphasis on College Support Services to increase the knowledge of dyslexia at an individual and Institutional level, which would lead to increased awareness of dyslexia, which may in turn result in the respondents not feeling concerned about disclosing their disability.

9:3:2 Open about their dyslexia to fellow students

Nearly all the respondents recalled being open about dyslexia to their fellow students.

Yes I usually do tell everyone, such as fellow access students, about my dyslexia. I think it is important that everyone knows. It helps me to explain a lot things about me remembering names, because usually I'm particularly bad at remembering names and I have to tell them why I can't remember their names basically. (Simon)

Yeah, I think, I don't think I met anybody at least in education, that I've not mentioned it to. I think it's very important for me that people know that I am dyslexic. (James)

Yes. Not at first but then I never did, but after a while I and a fellow student kind of spread it for me that I was dyslexic. Yes, everybody knew because it was brought up a lot of the time. (Jane)

Tom recalled how the Support Tutor he worked with helped him to be open about his dyslexia to fellow students.

Well when it came out [Support Tutor] offered us all the routes one could take to be open to fellow students about our dyslexia. One can either keep quiet and cope with it or use the coping strategies that you either have, or build up, in order to be open about it. (Tom)

The effect of the support from the tutor was that Tom became open about his disability to his peers because he did not view it as a threat.

I'm not having to teach them at College about dyslexia, that's the predominant thing, and secondly I would hope that the vast majority of people here would see it as something positive as opposed to a threat. After working with [Support Tutor] I am quite happy to be open about my dyslexia to fellow students. (Tom)

The emphasis is very much on the individual dyslexic to raise awareness of this disability within and outside the educational environment probably because of concerns about breaking confidentiality. The significance of relying on the individual dyslexic is that their experience has an important influence on how this disability is represented to their non-disabled peers in either a positive or negative manner. The reliance on the individual can, therefore, advance or regress the

position of dyslexia, which may also affect the representation of disabled people within or outside the educational environment. Tom's experience shows how we can move away from this unreliable emphasis on the individual by looking to the Support Tutor to help the individual to develop an awareness and understanding of this disability. Simon recalled how working with his Support Tutor on strategies to disclose his disability helped him to also develop a greater personal awareness of his dyslexia.

Through working with my Support Tutor on strategies on how to disclose my dyslexia, I have found out what is the matter with me. My greater understanding has helped me to explain my dyslexia and why I usually can't remember names and various other things. It seems to be working for me, whereas my past life it was always a disadvantage. (Simon)

Jenny reinforces this view with her experiences.

For me I previously thought of dyslexia as a problem that can't be dealt with. But after help from [Support Tutor] there is no need to be embarrassed about being dyslexic. I've come to terms with it now. (Jenny)

The value of working with the Support Tutor is that this would help to represent dyslexia, and maybe other disabilities, within a positive context to these respondents and their non-disabled peers. This approach may help to challenge the negative representation of disabled people within and outside the educational environment. To achieve this goal there is an emphasis on the Support Tutor to have a good working understanding and awareness of the needs of dyslexic people.

Four of the respondents felt the disclosure of dyslexia helped to raise awareness of this disability between their peers. Jenny remembered this particular experience.

I don't think it would hurt my fellow students to know about dyslexia. I think them knowing I was dyslexic and me being open about it helped to raise awareness of this disability. (Jenny)

Simon, Tom and James support this view with their experiences of *access*.

I think the more you talk about problems, as indeed other people tell me about their problems, it helps to promote understanding and awareness. You begin to think it's not that much of a problem. I mean everybody's got problems, some great some small. (Simon)

Look at these spelling mistakes on here, I'm a dyslexic and I can see them, something like that sort of softens the blow of the attitude towards it. It makes light of it but doesn't trivialise it as well, which is important. (Tom)

I know dyslexics have been called lazy and stupid, but I hope my fellow students, when they see how I work, realise that this is not the case, which hopefully will challenge some of the negative images. (James)

There was also the recognition from the respondents that if knowledge of dyslexia is to be increased, it is for the participants to be open about their dyslexia. James recalled the importance of being open about his dyslexia, in his relationships with fellow students.

I think the lack of understanding goes not 'oh no he's got dyslexia and that is a big problem.' Instead its the other way round its like 'oh its a superficial problem and nothing to be concerned about.' I think the lack of knowledge can only be overcome and the knowledge of dyslexia increased through the individual being open about their disability. (James)

And his lecturers.

I think there is a lack of understanding of dyslexia between my lecturers. My Psychology teacher said to me once that dyslexia was not the real problem and that really offended me. I think you mean it's not like 'oh you're dyslexic, oh your poor thing!' 'It is like the other way round, it is like 'oh it may get his d's and b's backwards but he'll get over it.' This is the feeling I get sometimes. The only way in which you can change their attitudes is through telling them how

my dyslexia affects me, which will hopefully show them something different. (James)

There is a need for the individual and the Support Tutor to work together to overcome the barriers a dyslexic student would face within the educational environment. To achieve this goal the responsibility falls on the Institution, the Support Tutor, and the student, working together to raise and promote knowledge of the needs of dyslexic students. There is a responsibility on Institutions to provide a Support Service which is able to meet the needs of dyslexic students. Turning to staff, it is necessary that this group have knowledge of dyslexia and the support strategies available to help individual students to achieve academic success. There is also a responsibility on students to make use of the available support and to work in partnership with staff to increase knowledge of dyslexia within and outside the college they are attending.

The responsibility falls on both the Support Tutors and the individual to educate lecturers and fellow students about this disability. James remembered how his peers became more aware of dyslexia after they read his work:

Once my friends had a direct experience of dyslexia and how it disadvantages you, such as my writing, they only really develop and gain an understanding of this disability. (James)

Tom supports this view with his experience of working with fellow students.

When my fellow students see that you can speak reasonably well, and they can see that your answering questions in an intelligent way, they develop some understanding of dyslexia and how it affects me. So they begin to realise that dyslexia is not that bad. (Tom)

It is through direct experience that the negative images of this disability can potentially be challenged and overcome. Critics of this view may feel that this sets up the dyslexic individual to be viewed as someone different and maybe in certain circumstances part of a freak show. It is likely that only in particular circumstances

or environments would direct experience have a positive result. On these particular occasions, there was a positive outcome because the students who enrolled on *access*, irrespective whether they are dyslexic, were all from disadvantaged groups. Whilst the non-dyslexic students may not be able to specifically identify with their dyslexic peers, it is likely that commonality will occur at a more general level.

9:3:3 Reaction of fellow students to their dyslexia

Respondents talked about the reaction of fellow students to their disability. Their encounters can be grouped around two headings. Nearly all the respondents recalled how their peers displayed various positive reactions to their disability. Jane recalled how her fellow students asked her about dyslexia.

No, a lot of people have asked me what dyslexia is and how it affects me. They seemed to take a really positive approach to asking me about it, which made me feel good. (Jane)

Tom, Jenny and James support this view with their experiences.

They asked me a range of questions, such as "what does dyslexia mean?" And "how come you have ended up like that?" They were reasonably positive in their approach, but a few have been reasonably stand offish. (Tom)

One of my fellow students came round and said 'You have been christened dyslexic?' And she went onto say that it was nothing to be ashamed of, in fact she was good. (Jenny)

My friends were quite interested. We were talking about it and they were asking "what is dyslexia?" and how it affects people. It was a really positive approach, because I felt they were interested, which encouraged me to keep on coming to college. (James)

Another respondent, who decided not to disclose his disability, felt there would not be a negative reaction from his peers if he told them.

I wouldn't expect any flak at all if I told my fellow students that I was dyslexic. But I have decided not to tell them because I do not think it is any of their business. (Daniel)

These responses suggest that some fellow students have an open mind towards dyslexia. This means they are prepared to ask questions about how this disability affects the individual within the educational environment. The respondents' peers were probably prepared to ask questions because they identified with the individual's educational difficulties.

I remember one of my peers telling me that they could identify with my negative experiences of school, when I was telling them what I was like. This, at times, helped me to feel that my fellow students would have some understanding of what it was like to be dyslexic. (Simon)

Maybe these individuals are asking questions so they could provide appropriate help and support to the individual, as is recalled by Jenny:

One time, when I was having a drink, I remember one of my friends asking me what it was like to be dyslexic. I said it was like such and such, and I asked why? She said it was so she could help me if I needed it. After this I felt really happy because I could rely on some of my peers, if I needed to. (Jenny)

The value of this supportive approach is that it helps to create an inclusive environment, which would help the respondents to feel no different to their peers. The knock on effect would help to increase knowledge of this disability, which again may help to challenge the negative representation of dyslexics, within and outside the educational environment.

Some of the respondents also talked about being worried about the reaction of their peers to dyslexia. Jane recalled fearing that other students would gain the wrong idea of this disability:

Yes, I think that they might get the wrong idea about dyslexia. I've told these people that I'm dyslexic and I immediately got paranoid. I just kind of thought to myself that people may think that I am stupid and probably wouldn't come near me. (Jane)

Daniel and Tom further supported this view when they considered the prospect of disclosing his disability outside the College:

The majority of the people hear jokes about dyslexia, just like some people do with ethnic jokes. Sometimes I am concerned that these comments will influence their judgement of me, if I told them I am dyslexic. (Daniel)

I am not taking the risk telling people that I am dyslexic because I think there is little understanding, which could affect my job. One choir man knows but he's a terribly inviting person and I don't think it would cross his mind to bother saying anything to anyone else. I just would not take the risk in going about and telling somebody because perhaps they might take some sort of mild offence to it. (Tom)

Tom also felt that one of the "dangers" of disclosure would be financial ruin, because of the lack of understanding of this disability outside the College environment.

I can't from a professional and a financial point of view run the risk of telling people that I am dyslexic. I know I can do the job perfectly well and that I'm not teaching them a load of rubbish, but I am concerned that a lack of understanding may have a negative effect. (Tom)

These responses show that there is little understanding or awareness of the needs of dyslexic people within and outside the educational environment. It is through chance encounters that the individual shapes their attitude towards dyslexia, which, if anything, could influence their decision to better themselves through a return to education. These negative attitudes also result in the respondents wanting to hide their disability, because they want to be treated as "normal." They are concerned that, if they disclosed their disability that they would be treated

differently and, therefore, excluded from society. The problem with the individual hiding their disability is that they may not be able to reach their full potential, which obviously defeats the purpose of them returning to education with the intention of bettering themselves. Also by hiding their dyslexia the respondents are in danger of limiting the knowledge and understanding of this disability, which may reinforce the negative attitudes towards it. A possible step forward is for the individual to be open about their disability, because this is probably the only way to raise awareness of dyslexia. Obviously this would be difficult for the individual, because they would have to run the risk of experiencing negative attitudes towards them. There is a clear need for educational institutions to raise and increase awareness of the needs of disabled people both with the individuals and their non-disabled peers and lecturers. This approach is needed, because the educational environment is an ideal opportunity to shape individuals' perception and attitude towards disability.

9:4 Experiences of meeting new people through access

When investigating the respondents' experiences they talked about meeting new people through their specific *access* course. Norman remembered how he made new friends:

Yes, certainly with the normal *access* group, yes, it was a great opportunity to meet new people. They are all great friends. They are all there for the same thing and that's to get on with the course. And any help we can give each other is because we want to.(Norman)

Tom, Jenny and James recalled how *access* also provided the opportunity for them to meet new people:

Yes, *access* did provide an opportunity to meet new people. Before hand I was very anti-social and very introverted. With meeting all these new people through *access* I have come out of my shell. (Tom)

When you've all introduced each other and you've all got going, it feels like a family. My fellow students are more like sisters and brothers to me. It was so good when you've got two hours and you would stop half way through for a cup of coffee, it would be an ideal opportunity to meet new people because we would discuss what we had just been taught. (Jenny)

Oh yes, definitely, *access* has been an opportunity to meet new people such as mature students. I left the army last year and I came to College, where I didn't really know anybody, but since I've been at College I just like know everyone. I've met so many people, like friends and families. So yes, it's opened up a new kind of social life for me. (Jane)

It's been quite good actually, as an opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. You begin to realise, as well that, you can turn to these friends if your're feeling like quitting, or if your're feeling a bit down. Somebody to lean on type of thing. (James)

These positive experiences can help the respondents to feel part of the student body, no different to their peers. The respondents cannot believe these positive experiences are happening, because they expected the similar negative experiences, which they encountered whilst at school, from fellow students. If anything these individuals may begin to feel that their disability is not such a barrier that they have to overcome within their lives. Alternatively the effect of these positive experiences may be that the respondents develop the self-confidence to attend College.

For a start if you have got more friends it gives you more confidence to go to College. You get to the point when you look forward to coming into College because you know your're going to see your friends. (Jenny)

Norman supports this view with his experience of *access*.

Through meeting new people whilst on *access* I have gained the confidence to attend College. Their friendships help to create support and a feeling of unity. It is us against the world and that kind of thing. (Norman)

The respondents are clearly encouraged to attend College because they realise they will not be treated any differently by their peers. They possibly encountered a positive experience because their peers were also struggling academically, therefore they viewed dyslexia no differently to the general barriers they faced, such as returning to education as a single mother. As has already been shown with fellow dyslexics, the feeling of unity or common identity maybe extended to non-disabled students because they also have to overcome barriers if they are to achieve educational success. Tom supports this view, when he provided a reason why his peers did not perceive his dyslexia as an issue:

You know we are all on *access* because it is our second chance within education, irrelevant of our backgrounds. It makes me feel less different to my peers because we are all fellow travellers, who are all travelling a very similar path to me. (Tom)

Dyslexia was probably not viewed as an issue because *access* is viewed as a second chance for individuals to achieve educational success. These respondents' experiences suggest that a range of groups disabled, or not, have been failed previously by the educational system and have identified *access* as an opportunity to achieve academic success.

When investigating their experiences further, the respondents seemed to have a much better experience of meeting new people whilst full-time than part-time:

Whereas when you were full time you knew everybody's name. You'd go down to the coffee shop and we would all sit together, but when you're part-time you don't do that sort of thing. (Jenny)

James supports this view with his experience of *access*.

The different classes and things you know. You only see each other for up to two hours then you go to other classes. So you don't get that close to you're fellow students, it wasn't the same experience as

when full-time, which was a good opportunity to meet new people and make friends. (James)

It is possibly the structure of the part-time *access* course at this particular College, which resulted in these respondents not being able to meet as many new people. James supported this view when he compared his experiences whilst enrolled on *access* full-time and part-time.

Whilst full-time a lot of the lessons have been in the mornings, which would result in you having the afternoon free. I would hang around after the lessons and I would normally bump into fellow students. So the coffee shop, at times, was a good opportunity to meet fellow students. Whereas, whilst part-time I was very much on my own. (James)

The problem here is that the respondents may feel isolated from the student body because they are more on their own whilst enrolled on the part-time mode of study. James again supports this view.

I don't see the same people as I used to last year. Part-time students just come into College do the class and then they go. The social side of it has been lacking more this year than the previous year, which is a shame I suppose. (James)

The feelings of isolation may increase the chances of them considering of dropping out, because these individuals feel that they cannot turn to individual students for academic and pastoral support. It is understandable that the respondents felt isolated, because in one respect they are starting *access* again through this different mode of study, therefore, reflecting the anxieties they encountered before they originally started *access*. As well the respondents felt more isolated through the part-time route because it offers different objectives to those which would be available through the full-time route. It seems likely that the full-time route would offer an academic and social experience, whereas the part-time route would tend to

offer an academic experience only. Tom supported this view when he recalled *access* being an academic and social experience:

Yes, *access* has been an academic and social experience. An experience into education or rather it's been an experience back into education. (Tom)

Jane reinforced this view:

Yes, *access* has been an academic and social experience because I learned so much about the subjects I have studied and the people who I have studied with. It's like opened up a whole new way of life, it's so different to what I have been used to. It's certainly a whole new experience. (Jane)

Access, for some of the respondents, is providing them with the opportunity to have the positive social experiences which they may have missed out on earlier in their education. To an extent, these positive encounters may encourage the respondents to feel more included, therefore, less different to their peers, within or outside the educational environment. When considering a return to education through courses such as *access*, it is important for an individual to consider what route would best suit their needs and what they wanted to achieve through this pathway.

9:5 Discussion

The Substantive Theory, which emerged from the respondents' experiences of relationships with other students whilst on *access*, is that on the whole the respondents experienced positive relations with fellow *access* students, because they wanted to achieve the same thing, which was educational success. With the respondents generally recalling positive relations with their peers, it needs to be explored why this might be the case, and whether or not there are any barriers in place which prevented the individual from having more positive encounter.

The respondents encountered improved relations with their peers because they could identify with each other, whether or not they were dyslexic, because of prior negative educational experiences encountered either at school or College (Palfreman-Kay and Taylor, 2000). Identifying with each other occurs because both groups have come from similar educational backgrounds. Therefore, when dyslexic and non-dyslexic students come together on *access* they can potentially understand each other, because they have an appreciation of the difficulties each other has faced within the educational system. And the intention behind *access*, which was a second chance to do something better with their lives (McFadden, 1995) helps to reinforce the feeling of a common identity.

Turning to the *access* programme itself, this feeling of common identity is reflected through the respondents experiencing support from their peers and, vice versa, such as collecting notes or providing support and encouragement with their studies. This supportive approach occurs because both groups realise that they can benefit from this type of help, developing their own learning skills and confidence. Cann (1985) has a similar view:

If opportunities are given for people to test their knowledge against others in a supportive environment, then incidental learning can create general satisfaction. (p.101).

The impact of this approach is that it helps to develop a greater unity and togetherness within the student body. The significance of this supportive approach is that the respondents will feel included within the *access* environment, therefore helping the respondents to develop a feeling of self-confidence that they can achieve academic success. Stephenson and Percy (1989) suggest a supportive attitude is a common characteristic displayed by *access* students, irrespective of disability. This feeling of self-confidence may also encourage the individual students to believe that they can further their education.

It is now necessary to consider whether or not there were any barriers in place, which prevented the respondents from having an even more positive experience of *access*. The main barrier that the respondents faced was the lack of knowledge about dyslexia at an individual level. This concern was reflected through some of the respondents feeling embarrassed and different whilst they were coming to terms with the fact that they were dyslexic. It was noticeable that once these individuals received help from the Support Tutor they displayed a much more positive attitude towards dyslexia.

There was also the concern that once, the respondent's peers discovered that the individual was dyslexic, they would be treated differently. The respondents were probably reflecting society's attitude towards disability, which is reflected through media examples such as the telethon fund raising event (Morris, 1993). In such media disabled people are perceived as "tragic individuals." This could explain why Tom and Daniel decided not to disclose that they were dyslexic outside college, because they feared a negative reaction.

However, with the common educational background bringing the respondents and their non-dyslexic peers onto *access*, it suggests that the respondents may not always encounter negative attitudes from their peers. This view is reflected through Jenny, Tom and James recalling positive encounters when they disclosed their disability to their peers. However, with Palfreman-Kay and Taylor (2000) highlighting examples of dyslexics being treated as objects of humour by fellow *access* students, or their peers not believing that this disability existed, it suggests that the respondents who took part in the second stage of the research were fortunate enough to come into contact with individuals who did not wholly reflect society's negative attitude towards disability.

The Formal Theory to explain the respondents' experiences of relations with other students whilst on *access* was that within certain environments dyslexia is not a barrier when forming positive relations between each other. Dyslexia is not a barrier to forming positive relations with others in environments such as *access*, because it was a forum designed to attract:

...those groups who have been least well-served by the school system and who face particular barriers to entry to Higher Education. (Kearney and Diamond 1987, p.38).

It is the commitment of *access* to bring together non-traditional groups, such as disabled people and these from ethnic minority groups, which could explain why the respondents encountered positive relations with their peers. *Access* is, therefore, a structure which seeks to create an enabling environment, through involving all the groups it was designed to attract, providing a second chance to achieve academic success. This common identity was reinforced through the various groups enrolling on *access* coming from similar often poor educational backgrounds. The impact of this is that programmes such as *access* are more disability aware, than other programmes, including recognising the needs of dyslexic people. This is through offering a flexible approach to learning, which can take into consideration the needs of the various groups enrolling on this educational programme, whether this is small group learning or providing subject material in alternative formats. The emphasis on a flexible *access* curriculum reflects a student centred and negotiated approach to studying that is characteristic of Adult and Further Education (Murray, 1987). Through *access* bringing a range of groups together, this educational programme has the potential to raise knowledge of the needs of dyslexic people and helps to challenge existing attitudes towards this disability.

By exploring how, in certain circumstances, dyslexia is not a barrier when forming positive relations between people, it is important to link the Substantive and Formal Theories into a more general explanation. The Cululative body of theory explains the respondents' experiences of relationships with other students whilst on *access* in terms of *access* having the potential to help students (dyslexic or non-dyslexic) who enrol on this course to be more aware of dyslexia than others who follow different entry routes into Higher Education. When dyslexic and non-dyslexic people come together through fora such as *access*, it is possible that both groups will develop a greater understanding of this particular disability. This occurs through the individual student discovering that they are dyslexic and the impact it has on their life, whether this is within the educational environment or the working world. Furthermore, non-dyslexic people will potentially be able to gain a greater understanding of this disability and how it affects the individual. The significance of both dyslexic and non-dyslexic people obtaining a greater understanding of this disability is that it has the potential to challenge negative attitudes toward disability throughout society.

The picture that emerges is that dyslexic students enrolling on educational programmes such as *access* can have positive relations with their peers. This is because *access* is often drawing together individuals who have previously had a negative educational experience, resulting in students identifying with each other, creating a feeling of unity within the student body (Pantziarka, 1987). The significance of the respondents encountering such positive relations is that it helps to challenge negative attitudes towards dyslexia within society, showing that the problems dyslexics face are not excuses, but genuine difficulties which because arise of the way in which the educational environment and wider society are structured.

Chapter 10 “Through the help of [support tutor] I believe that I can achieve my access qualification.”

Experiences of support whilst on access

10: 1 Experiences of support equipment

When exploring the respondent experiences they talked about using support equipment to help them with their studies. Their experiences are grouped around the issue of using a computer and a dictaphone.

The first area was the institution providing its dyslexic students with a computer:

At first they gave me a laptop, which was ok as far as it goes, because it did help me to get work done. The next one they got me was brilliant, but it came too late. It was really good because it had software such as voice recognition software, Dragon Dictate. The computer was a really big help. (James)

I believe this College has a limited number of about half a dozen computers, which I found out through my own enquires. I actually got one that had been due back for two months. So I was actually waiting on its return, I was fortunate enough to be issued it within two weeks, but that was that. (Daniel)

These respondents gained a computer to support them with their studies because they declared their dyslexia to the relevant Support Services and equipment was offered to help them with their studies. It is interesting to note that James was the only individual who was offered a computer as a matter of course, but Daniel obtained a computer more through a personal enquiry than any other reason. Colleges B and C were the only institutions which operated a computer loaning scheme.

When exploring the respondents' experiences of this loan scheme further, they recalled each College providing little support or training in helping the individual to get used to using the computer. James recalled the difficulties he initially had in

using computer he was loaned first:

I spent time looking for where the mouse was on the screen and the programmes that would help me. I also had a problem with the keyboard because it was slow and I could not concentrate as well, which meant I could not concentrate on my thoughts. I felt physically tired which wasn't a great help. (James)

He remembered similar difficulties when he was loaned another computer:

At the moment I'm still learning how to use the Dragon Dictate, but once I've become proficient I think it will be great to help me when writing essays. This is because I will not have to use the keyboard, which would allow my thoughts to flow more freely. (James)

Daniel recalled similar difficulties.

Trying for the first time to utilise this piece of equipment for an immediate need, when you are required to write essays, is really hard because you have to get used to the packages, which you may have not used before. I think that something like that needs to be considered. (Daniel)

He went onto highlight one reason why using a computer was difficult.

When I signed for the computer I was given a book on how to operate it, which is fine, but then I'm dyslexic. I don't have a really true concern with getting the books out and reading them, but it is actually a bit of a contradiction to provide someone who is dyslexic with reading material. (Daniel)

The problem here was that these respondents were not provided with any support to help them get used to using a computer. A confusing picture emerges, because even though the respondents had difficulties in using these computers, they attended Information Technology classes as part of their course. James remembered his experiences of attending these sessions:

I do IT at the actual College. So through these sessions I've got an introduction to the basics, which was really good. When I was given the second computer, an individual, who showed me how to use a

computer and the various packages, gave me his phone number to ring if I had any problems. He said he would come over if I got stuck. (James)

Daniel remembered the Information Technology requirement of his *access* course.

Part of the criteria here, with this governing board and with this course at [College C], is that you have to attend an IT class, but that is only for one hour and that is on a Friday morning. These sessions provide you with an introduction to the basics. It is at GNVQ level three. (Daniel)

You would possibly expect that, through these classes, the respondents would develop the necessary skills to use their computers to help them with their studies. However, being taught different packages to those the respondents are used to could explain why they encountered difficulties. This, to an extent, is true, because James and Daniel did talk about using different Information Technology packages on the machines that were loaned to them. Alternatively the respondents problems may suggest that the Information Technology classes provided were ineffective in providing the individual with the necessary individual help to develop the necessary skills. This may be because of large class sizes, which result in the lecturer being unable to provide the necessary help. One of the difficulties that might arise was that the respondents may have felt confident in using a computer because of the amount of information that they are expected to learn, which is understandable because of the concern that they might lose academic work. Alternatively, perhaps the individuals were not interested in learning different packages that are not available because, they do not have the time with everything else they are expected to learn. Whilst a loan scheme is most welcome, it is probably necessary to provide a machine and support at the earliest stage possible. Daniel supported this view when he recalled his experience of using a computer.

You're not really proficient in using a computer until at least half way through the course, this is when you are able to operate and feel

comfortable about getting around the various packages such as Word for Windows. If it is going to take you a couple of months to use the various packages it is probably a good idea to be lent the computer at the earliest stage possible. (Daniel)

The value of providing Information Technology support or other study skills, before *access* is that it increases the chances of the respondent being able to compete on more of an "equal playing field", and therefore, to achieve academic success. An individual may also be able to develop increased confidence in their academic abilities, which would occur if the student was more familiar with the course requirements before it started. This approach could also lead to the chance discovery of dyslexia or allow time for a screening programme. On the whole, this approach would help to create an inclusive educational environment and to increase the chances of the respondents having a much-improved educational experience.

The next area that the respondents focussed on was the use of a computer for academic work. Three of the respondents remembered how the use of a computer helped to improve basic English skills. Tom remembered how his spellchecker on his computer at home helped to improve his work.

The spellchecker, even on Word 3, helped me enormously. Now I have got words that are so obscure it is just not true and a similar thing is happening to Word 6 as well. The spellcheckers on both these packages helped enormously. (Tom)

Daniel supports this view.

If any of the support has made any difference it's the bloody laptop. The laptop has got a spell check on it, grammar checker and a thesaurus. Through using these packages I have got the ability to clear paragraphs, change sentences, to restructure work, to retain that work, to adapt it and to make several copies at the press of a button. If anything these packages make all the difference in the world to the standard of work, it really does. But at the same time, a lot of it is American, and it's not fool proof. (Daniel)

These respondents found the spelling, grammar and language packages useful because they helped the individual to write their essays. They found these packages most helpful because they helped the respondents to feel that their work was no different to that of their peers. Alternatively, these packages helped the respondent to feel less different when they took completed work to the Support Tutor because it had reduced the amount of errors. Either one, or a combination, of these reasons may help to develop the respondents confidence in their academic work, which leads to a feeling of increased self confidence. This is reflected in Tom's, comment, he felt that he would not have passed *access* without the use of a computer:

Um, if I had not had a computer there would not have been a cats chance in hell of me getting through *access*. I owe my *access* certificate to a computer and the support from my wife. (Tom)

It seems a computer helped the respondent to produce improved academic work, which would not be the case if they did not have access to such a resource. This is It helped Tom to prepare, write, organise, spell and grammar-check his work. If anything Information Technology is helping the individual to compete on more of an equal footing with their non-disabled peers, which contributes to a feeling of inclusion.

Another respondent recalled how he would not use another computer because of the concern of standing out differently.

I would not use a computer because I would stand out differently from my fellow students especially in the classroom. They would probably ask me, 'Oh, what have you got that for?' Then I would have to tell them that I was dyslexic and then they would find everything out, which would make me feel different to them, especially in the English group with all sixteen and seventeen year olds. (Norman)

The concern here is that he would stand out from his peers, which would possibly lead to his peers discovering he was dyslexic. Daniel seemed to be concerned that once this discovery occurred he would be treated negatively and that his fellow students may view him as less academically capable. It is the fear of being viewed as different, instead of an objection to using Information Technology, which is the main obstacle:

I'm sure if the computer I had was a decent lap-top, or even a palm-held with windows, something like that, you know that I could hide under the desk, so no-one could see what I was doing, I would probably use it. (Norman)

A lack of understanding about dyslexia and the way Information Technology can help could, therefore, act as a barrier, which stops an individual from using support equipment to help them with their studies. If anything this may result in the individual not achieving the academic success of which they are capable. This could result in the individual feeling excluded, and in some instances they consider may leaving the educational environment.

When exploring the respondent experiences further, they recalled using a dictaphone to help them with their studies. Norman and Daniel questioned the point of using this equipment to help them with their work:

This morning this kid sat next to me and was waffling and waffling and I'm trying to get this stuff written down, doing a summary of work, and they were just yaking, and yaking, and yaking. I just could be doing without it, you know, if I had a dictaphone it wouldn't probably pick up what was said, and if it did, how useful would it have been, and I would have wasted valuable time. (Norman)

I can actually see the purpose for using a dictaphone, but if you're going to sit there and potentially record a whole hour or two hours of a lecture I do begin to question the point. This is because I have found it a lot easier to word process hand written notes than listen to a tape recording. For me this option has saved me time and money. (Daniel)

The difficulty here is that the dictaphone does not help to improve the respondent's academic work, instead they seem to act more as a hindrance. In fact Daniel felt it reinforced the difference between him and his fellow students:

The majority of my class are not aware of my disability and it does not emerge as an issue in any way in the classroom environment. So I feel uncomfortable about having a tape recorder sitting there with me clicking and clacking away and disrupting the class. (Daniel)

Tom supported this view when he remembered one of his lecturers was against him using a dictaphone.

I came up against a barrier with [lecturer] in using a dictaphone. She said there was no way in her lectures that she was going to have that sort of thing. I mean as we've seen her character develop over the year I can understand why, because half the things she said are totally and utterly against the principles of everyone else. (Tom)

As mentioned earlier, the dictaphone helps to reinforce or create a feeling of exclusion or difference within the educational environment. The time taken to transcribe information probably creates the biggest problem for the respondent because they do not have the time. This may contribute towards the feeling that they cannot cope with the academic requirements of *access*, which would lead to increased feelings of low self-esteem. As a result of these difficulties you would expect the respondents to be able to approach their lecturers for their notes, but the majority of the individuals did not mention this provision. These respondents' experiences suggest that equipment, in particular computers, dramatically helps to improve the educational experience. Some Colleges seem to be better than others in recognising how a computer can help, but the provision of this help seems to stem more from the individual than the educational environment itself.

10:2 Experiences of academic support from family, partner and friends

10:2:1 Family were supportive

Four of the respondents remembered how their family supported them whilst enrolled on *access*. Jenny talked about how her family provided general support.

My family have said there is nothing to be ashamed about being dyslexic. Instead of being ashamed of being dyslexic, they just say that you are dyslexic, you should not let it get to you. They said it is just something that was not picked up when you were at school. (Jenny)

James and Daniel support this experience as well.

They'll say, 'Isn't there anyone there who can help you at the College?' So I think they've got a feeling that there's not the right support there at times. They are always providing me with support to make sure I try and get what I am entitled to. (James)

Their support has always been asking me, 'Has the College being giving you the right guidance? Are they making enough allowances for you?' They say, 'You have dyslexia, and you're trying really hard, as anybody else on the course that doesn't have dyslexia, they should be making more compensation and more allowances for where you fall short.' Basically I have a tendency to agree with them. (Daniel)

The importance of this approach is that the respondents are provided with the encouragement to carry on with their studies. Their families seem keen to make sure they have the right help which will allow them to achieve academic success. The "knock on" effect of providing this help is that it may also encourage the respondents to ask for and search out support which, if anything, may provide the individual with the confidence to carry on and further their education. The support provided to the respondents is probably no different to the needs of non-disabled students, because the individual family want their child(ren) to achieve academic

success but through different means. This is suggested by the respondents remembering how members of their family provided specific support. Jenny remembered how one of her cousins would proof read her essays:

One of my cousins was really great! This was because he offered to proof read my essays for me, which was really good because it helped me to correct my mistakes before I handed them in, which helped my work. (Jenny)

Daniel and James supported this view:

Members of the family would, if I needed them to, help me with my essays. I would more often than not do it at home with the aid of members of the family, who would mainly proof read my work. (Daniel)

My sister will read anything if I want her to. It would normally be me bringing her an essay to read. She can really get her head around the work, which is really helpful. (James)

This specific support provided by different members of the family recognises the importance of the return to education for the respondents, as an opportunity to better their lives. The offer to proof read suggests members of the respondents' families have identified this form of help as the most significant contribution they could make towards helping the participant achieve academic success. This encouragement may also help the individual to feel more included within their family and the educational environment, by helping to increase knowledge and awareness of how dyslexia affects the individual.

10:2:2 Friends were supportive

Two of the respondents talked about their friends being supportive whilst enrolled on *access*. Jenny remembered being told that she had nothing to be ashamed of by being dyslexic:

My friends have been really supportive in the past. They said to me that it was nothing to be ashamed of by being dyslexic, which really helped because it helped me come to terms with my dyslexia. (Jenny)

James reinforced this view.

Their support was really helpful. It was so positive, it provided me with the encouragement to carry on with coming to College. If everyone had just turned their backs on me it wouldn't be very good, would it? Their support really helped my self-esteem, which is quite good. (James)

He goes on to think the support from his friends is superior to that from fellow College students.

Well I think the support from my friends is superior after the support from the staff...so I've either got brilliant friends or bad staff, you be the judge of that one. (James)

The support from these people probably made all the difference to the respondents it was their encouragement which helped them initially to decide on their return to education. James possibly makes the distinction between his friends and fellow students because they probably would be able to identify with his difficulties more for they have known him longer. Because of this it is understandable that the respondent would turn to these individuals to provide appropriate support.

One of the respondents also recalled not telling his friends about the support he was receiving:

I don't really tell them about the support I am receiving, do you know what I mean? I don't see it's that much to do with them. I mean my girlfriend and family obviously knows about the extra time, but I just do not think it is any business of my friends to know about the help I get at College. (Norman)

He goes onto provide a reason why he does not tell his friends.

I don't see really what it's got to do with them, I don't really want to go into all the whys and wherefores of why I'm getting it, you know if people are that interested then they can ask me. I suppose it is because I feel different to them. (Norman)

Norman did not tell his friends about the support he received because of the concern that relationships between him and his peers would change, which would result in him being treated differently. Alternatively, Norman may think disclosure of the support he is receiving is nothing to do with them, because it does not affect his relations with them. This is understandable, because the support Norman was receiving was helping him to achieve academic success by obtaining his *access* qualification.

10:2:3 Partner was supportive

Three of the respondents talked about their partners providing them with support. Tom talked about his partner proof reading academic work.

Yes [my partner] has been really great because she would proof read my essays for me when I needed it. Her help was really good because it helped me to keep up with the course. I suppose I had an advantage with [my partner] doing the same *access* course. (Tom)

Daniel and Norman also remembered how their partners would proof read essays:

She proof reads my work when I need her to. She has been a great asset to me because it has helped me to get improved marks. She could run through the essays and do all the spelling and re-structuring of the sentences. (Daniel)

She'll read stuff if I want her to. This would be really good because it would show me where I am making mistakes, but that is about it, really. (Norman)

These respondents also talked about how else their partners would provide other support. Tom remembered how his wife would help him to plan and organise his work.

Usually [partner] sort of locks me in a room and says "get on with it." This is really good because when I am coming up to deadlines it helps me to focus my mind, which helps me to plan and organise essays. (Tom)

Daniel talked about how his wife would act as a scribe.

My partner is very supportive because she, at times acts, as a scribe. I've been sat on a deadline and I find it very difficult because you are dictating out of books and this is where she helps, by writing information down. (Daniel)

These partners, through the help, they are providing, have become another support mechanism enabling the individual to compete on an equal footing with their non-disabled peers. The respondents turned to their partners because they are the closest individuals to them. Because of this relationship the respondents feel that they can trust these individuals to provide appropriate support with their studies. This relationship may also result in the respondent believing that they can talk to their partner about their difficulties, possibly because these individuals have been with the respondent when they discovered they were dyslexic. The respondents feel that these individuals are the only people they can talk to about their difficulties, because they have shared their experiences of coming to terms with their dyslexia. The participants were also turning to their partners before they hand in work to their College Support Tutor, so they can reduce the mistakes with their academic work, therefore, reducing the feeling of being different. Alternatively the respondents maybe seeking help from their partners because their College is not meeting their needs. This was the case with Daniel, who was unhappy with the fact that only group (instead of one-to-one support, which he wanted), was available to him. Tom also recalled being unhappy with the support he received at College because it made him feel different and stand out from his peers. Possibly there is a range of reasons why the respondents sought help from their partners, but for whatever reason they seek help, and from whoever, it is

because they want to increase the chances of obtaining academic success. Daniel talked about how important the support from his partner was:

She has been one of the greatest assets out whilst I have been doing this course. I would say if this support, whether it has been from family, partner or friends, has been a god-send, it makes all the difference in the world. (Daniel)

Whatever help a partner, family or friend provides, it creates the platform that encourages the respondent to re-enter and progress with their education. It is understandable that the respondents turned to these individuals because, if anything, their support would provide them with the confidence to undertake their studies.

10: 3 Experiences of support sessions

10:3:1 Support Tutor shows basic English skills

When exploring the respondent experiences they identified three areas in which the Support Tutor showed them basic English skills. Simon talked about the Tutor providing help with planning and organising essays.

My worst fault, which she is trying to get me out of, is that I do not make a plan or organise my essays, I just dive straight in which means that I tend to write lots of stuff. (Simon)

He goes on to talk about how the Tutor would help him to organise essays.

I have a tendency to repeat things. She will sit down with me, go through it, ask me what I intend to say and in the end she helps me to put my essays in a nice logical order. So it is my organisational skills which she is trying to help me with. (Simon)

Jenny, James and Jane also recalled how the Support Tutor would help them to plan and organise essays.

I would bring [Support Tutor] my notes and he would sit down with me and help me to plan and organise an essay from start to finish. His help improved the standard of my work no end. (Jenny)

Yeah [Support Tutor] would show me, planning strategies, like essay plans and things like that. Yeah, it's the same that they would teach everybody else. He would say picture an essay like a wheel, where you'd have the intro, the paragraphs and conclusion. (James)

I have never planned or organised anything in my life, but [Support Tutor] has looked at various different ways with me about how to plan and organise an essay. Yes, she has helped and taught me how to plan and organise essays. (Jane)

It seems, from the responses, that this was one of the first times that they have been shown how to write an essay. This raises the question, why so late in the respondents' educational experience? Was this because dyslexia was not recognised at an earlier stage of the educational experience? Perhaps the respondents had not really been shown, leads to the individual being labelled as "not academically capable" and left to fail. It is therefore understandable that the respondent had not really developed an essay writing technique because they had not been shown how to previously. One possible effect of now being shown how to write an essay is that the respondent developed feelings of confidence in their own academic abilities, which helped them to feel more included than in previous educational experiences. With being shown how to plan and organise, it suggests that these individuals do not have a problem learning information about the subjects being taught, but instead the barrier is expressing the knowledge appropriately on paper. And, given that the majority of the respondents recalled how the Tutor helped them to plan and organise, the difficulty of expressing one self on paper can be viewed as among the characteristics of dyslexia.

The second area, which the respondents identified as important, was the Support Tutor providing them with Literacy Skills support. Simon remembered the help of the Support Tutor.

She gives me help with composition and certainly spelling, because I always make mistakes. I could re-write something time and time again and I will make different mistakes every time I write and I am extremely slow. (Simon)

Norman James and Jenny supported this view.

She would show me basic spelling rules such as knocking the plurals off 'their and there' and 'to, two and too' and stuff like that. I'm like 'bloody hell I didn't know any of this kind of stuff' I am learning so many more things through the support I am receiving. (Norman)

If I'm working on an essay I would take it to see [Support Tutor] and we'd like swap this around and improve my grammar and punctuation and things. This is good, because he is teaching me things I did not previously know about. (James)

I was still getting over the shock of being diagnosed as being dyslexic, and I felt a bit ashamed for that fact that I'd got to ask for help. Then I remember [Support Tutor] telling me that part of my support was help with my English skills such as spelling, grammar and punctuation. (Jenny)

These respondents were possibly shown these basic literacy skills because they had difficulty expressing themselves on paper. It would seem a lack of knowledge or awareness of dyslexia may again explain why these individuals were not previously shown these basic skills. This suggests little knowledge of dyslexia by teachers or lecturers, or that the support the respondents were previously provided with was ineffective in meeting their needs. When looking at the educational experience of the respondents, either of these explanations is plausible.

The third area that the respondents identified was the support tutor proof reading their essays:

[Support Tutor] would proof read my essays for me which really helped because she would ask me to explain things she did not

understand. [Support Tutor] would also show me where I am going wrong with my grammar and spelling, which really helped. (Tom)

Norman and Jane supported this view.

Yeah, I show my essays to [Support Tutor] and she gives me very useful feedback which helps me to improve on the next essays. In fact I will show my essays to anyone who will read it. I am constantly bringing them sheets of stuff to read through. (Norman)

Yeah, she proof reads my essays for me. If I've handed essays in and they've come back rather poor then I take them to her and she'll look through it for me. By her looking through the essay, she shows where I've gone wrong and through this support she helps me put it back together again. (Jane)

The respondents are using the Support Tutor as someone to show these individuals where they are going wrong with their essays. There are a range of reasons why the respondent turns to the Tutor to proof read their work, one of the main reasons being that they feel that this individual has an understanding of the difficulties and problems they face within society. It is through this understanding that the respondents build up a feeling of trust with this individual, because they believe the Tutor has their best interests at heart. The respondents are, therefore, using the Tutor as an academic safety net, because through the relationship which has developed, they have realised any feedback would be supportive and encouraging, therefore, moving away from the embarrassing situations they experienced earlier within their education. James supported this view with his experience of the support sessions.

If someone is there to help you, it provides you with a feeling of security because knowing someone is there is like a kind of safety net. I suppose, if you start to struggle, it is so good to know that someone is there to help. (James)

The significance of these forms of help provided through the support sessions is that the respondents possibly became more confident in their academic abilities.

Norman supported this view when he felt that, after the help he received that, English was not such a difficult subject after all.

Through the support of the Tutor, English is now no more of a barrier because she has made the subject more accessible, which is really good. Before hand, I viewed English as a foreign language, but it is now not so much of a battle. (Norman)

One of the reasons why the support improved the respondents' academic experience was because any help provided was one-to-one. It is through these one-to-one sessions, which was the first time they encountered such help, that the respondents had the confidence to try with their work. In the past the negative reaction of teachers, or fellow students, may have stopped the individual from trying, from or seeking help with work because of the fear of standing out, especially within the classroom environment. Through these sessions, the respondents believed that they can achieve academic success.

10:3:2 Felt the support was good

Respondents identified three areas where they felt the support provided was good. Norman remembered being told what help was available to him when he checked out the College:

When I actually enquired about what help was available, they sat me down in the Student Centre and they went through all the stuff like what they could do for me such as extra time for exams, one to one support and about getting into University. They also showed me around the facilities and introduced me to the Head of Special Needs. (Norman)

He goes on to remember that from his initial enquiry an appointment was made for him to meet the Support Tutor.

After my initial meeting, I made an appointment with the Head of Special Needs to come back and discuss in more detail the support that they could provide me with. (Norman)

James reinforced this view when he enquired about what support was available.

When I first enquired about *access* I asked about what support might be available. It was the first thing on my mind when I walked through the door. (James)

He also talked about being introduced to the Support Services and relevant staff on his initial enquiry about the help available:

I think when I very first came I was introduced to the dyslexic expert, she was the one that introduced me to the Support Staff the facilities and the equipment available to dyslexics at the College. (James)

These experiences suggest that there are some structures and support in place to help dyslexic students within the Further Educational environment. It is noticeable that these individuals discover support through their own personal enquiry, which raises questions about College publicity such as its Disability Statement? One of the intentions behind the Disability Statement was to provide prospective disabled students with accurate information about the provision available at Colleges of Further Education. With this requirement being already in place before these respondents started *access*, you would expect them to make a reference to it, especially given that Norman and James were already aware of their dyslexia before they re-entered the educational environment. With these and the other respondents making no reference to the Disability Statement as an information source it, suggests that it is failing to meet students' needs. A dyslexic person is, therefore, more likely to discover the support available through chance, or personal enquiry, or by being fortunate enough to come into contact with College staff who have knowledge of dyslexia and the support available to this group.

I think that somebody, probably at my level, as a dyslexic mature student, is really only going to find out what support is available by asking and not expecting to be told. Maybe, it is an age thing, but I do not expect anyone to tell me. (Daniel)

It is possibly because of the age of the individual, and their return to education, that they are more likely to ask about what help is available. There is, maybe, a greater emphasis on finding out what support is available because they realise this return to education is key towards them bettering their lives.

Five of the respondents also talked about the time it took to arrange the support package. Norman felt his support package was arranged quickly:

It was done near enough there and then, when I came back again to meet the Head of Special Needs. They basically promised to give me what they initially said they would do, which was the extra time and the additional tutoring. When I started College it was all in place for me. (Norman)

James and Jenny supported this view:

I think the support package was very quickly arranged for me. Let me think ... I'd have sessions with [Support Tutor] once a week and then there was a woman that came in to help on the computers as well. (James)

I went up to see [Support Tutor] after the dyslexia was confirmed through the assessment and he said that extra English lessons and someone to check over my work would be arranged. He would also put me in touch with one of the counsellors downstairs. (Jenny)

Some of the respondents also talked about the long time taken to arrange their support package.

A few weeks, yes I can't say how long, but it was a few weeks, um and it could have even been months. When I actually sat down we discussed various reading standards, firstly strategies such as reading a sentence, you know reading a text book then writing the key points down. (Tom)

He provided an explanation for the time taken to arrange support:

A possible reason why I took so long was because [Support Tutor] wanted to know where I wanted to build from, so providing a package that meets individual need. (Tom)

It seems each College has a different approach to arranging support packages for the respondents. One explanation provided by support staff was that it was quicker to arrange support for those individuals who declared their disability before they started *access*. This to an extent is understandable, because they would have more time to prepare and put into place support. Alternatively the difference maybe because of the time it would take for a student to discover their dyslexia. Combining this with a number of dyslexics possibly varying from year to year, such as was the case at College E which, until the 1997-98 academic year, had no experience of dyslexics, it is understandable the support package may take time because of the uncertainty over whether or not the funding is in place to provide it. The value of a support package being available is that it suggests an awareness of the needs of this student group, which helps to create a more inclusive educational environment.

Another positive element of the Support Session was being able to meet with a Support Tutor if they had any difficulties. James remembered being able to meet with the tutor when he had a problem:

It would be like once a week when I would meet with [Support Tutor] to discuss any problems or if I was stuck with something. When I found him he would always be willing to help, he would take an essay home and go through it for you. You got the feeling that he was always there for you. (James)

Jane and Tom supported this view.

We just arranged that I'd see her once a week if I had any problems with my work and required some help. So yes, if any problems arose I would go and see [Support Tutor] for some help. (Jane)

I must have only had a handful of meetings over the year, very few. But when I had them they were all useful because I could discuss and work on any problems that I might have with my work. (Tom)

The value of these meetings with a Support Tutor is that they provide the respondent with the opportunity to discuss any academic difficulties they might have, without the fear of being ridiculed for any mistakes that they make with their work. The relationship that develops between the respondents and the tutor is a friendship, because respondents feel that they can confide in this individual due to their academic status. Simon supported this view when he talked about the one-to-one support sessions.

I mean when you have one to one teaching they tend to begin to see your problems and they certainly give you an advice on an individual footing, which is really what I want. After a while I felt I could talk to [Support Tutor] about my whole experience of being at College, not just work. (Simon)

A consequence of this relationship is that the respondents are maybe talking about other experiences that they might have, such as their relationships with other students. The likelihood would be that the Support Tutor is providing academic and social support to the individual, within and outside the educational environment, through these meetings.

A further positive part of the support sessions was that they had helped to improve the academic experience. Three of the respondents identified various ways in which their support provided them with academic confidence. Norman talked about how the support gave him the confidence to write:

The support gave me the necessary confidence to write correctly, such as write and structure sentences properly and how to spell

words, which was of a great help. As a result of the support, writing was less of a struggle. (Norman)

Jane felt the support she had received has given her the confidence to read and write:

I'm reading books, I'm writing with confidence as a result of the support that I have received which has been really good. I think this has been one of my main achievements recently, the confidence to read and write. (Jane)

Tom felt that through support he developed the strategies to read:

Through the support I developed the coping strategies that would allow me to read. This was good because I could digest a lot more information and get it into my thick skull and understand it. (Tom)

The help is, therefore, allowing the individual to compete on an equal footing with their non-disabled peers, which creates a more inclusive educational environment.

As well as providing them with the confidence to tackle academic work the respondents felt academically no different to their non-disabled peers. Norman remembered how the support gave him the confidence to speak in the classroom environment:

Because of the support I have had, I've said things in class. I know it doesn't sound that big a thing, but before hand I'd never do it because of the fear that I would be laughed at, which resulted in me always hiding at the back of the class. (Norman)

Jenny reinforced this view.

Before I would not have spoken in the class, but now I just open my mouth anyway. I mean I have got to the point where I don't care whether it is wrong or right, but if I have got something to say then I'll say it. Whereas once I would have backed off and I would not have said anything and would have been quiet like a mouse. (Jenny).

The Support Sessions have given the respondents the confidence to participate

within classroom discussions. They have helped to remove the academic differences between the respondents and their peers, that may reinforce the feeling of difference. The significance of feeling more confident within the classroom is that it may increase the chance of the respondent learning and therefore achieving academic success. When comparing these encounters with the respondents' experiences of the classroom whilst at school, which were mainly negative, it suggests the Further Educational environment has a greater awareness of the learning needs of dyslexic students.

The extent to which confidence in academic abilities can develop is shown where the respondents used support less and less as *access* progressed.

As I say, I used her less and less towards the end of the course. I was getting better on my own merit. Not getting better to make me sound as if I was poorly, but I was improving and coping. I suppose I became more confident in my academic ability. (Tom)

Daniel further supported this view:

If I come here and *access* my Support Tutor it's because I'm having particular trouble with an area - a criteria of an assignment - or need a little bit of guidance. As the course progressed, I used the support less, because I became more confident. (Daniel)

The respondents are using the support available until they gain confidence in their academic abilities to "go it alone." James supported this view:

At the start of the course I used the Support available to me a lot because I just did not have the confidence in my academic ability. However, as the course has progressed I have not used the Support as much, and I think one of the reasons is because I am more confident in my academic ability. (James)

The intention of the Support available is to place the respondents on an equal footing with their peers, by providing them with the confidence that they can achieve academic success. It seems until the respondent has the confidence that

they can achieve academic success they will turn to the Tutor and the help they can provide.

10: 4 Experiences of relationships with Support Tutor

When exploring the respondent experiences they talked about their relationships with the Support Tutor. Their experiences are grouped around the issue of the Support Tutor helping the students to come to terms with their dyslexia.

Four of the respondents talked about the different ways in which their support tutor helped them to come to terms with dyslexia. Norman remembered how his tutor helped him by pointing out his strengths and weaknesses.

I'd say [Support Tutor] helped me to overcome my dyslexia by pointing out my strengths and weaknesses. It is really good because I get an accurate picture. [Support Tutor] will show me the things I've got to work on to get better marks. (Norman)

Tom talked about how his Tutor's understanding of dyslexia helped him to come to terms with his disability.

Yes she's brilliant, what she doesn't know isn't worth knowing about and what she doesn't know, she can find out. It is through working with her that I have come to terms with dyslexia. (Tom)

Jenny and Simon remembered how the support of their Tutor helped them to come to terms with dyslexia.

When I have been up and had a twenty minute chat with [Support Tutor] you come out feeling on top of the world. You feel like you can cope with anything especially my dyslexia. (Jenny)

She has helped me whilst I have struggled with my dyslexia as I started access by being there for me as someone who is prepared to listen. Through her support I have progressively come to terms with my disability. (Simon)

There are various ways in which the Support Tutor helped the respondents to come to terms with dyslexia. These different approaches reflect the fact that dyslexia affects each individual differently, therefore, the Tutor is providing support to meet individual need. With the respondent being directed to the Tutor, it suggests they are the only individuals who have an in-depth knowledge and awareness of this disability within the educational environment.

By helping the individual to come to terms with their dyslexia, the respondents felt the Tutor acted as an advocate on their behalf. Norman remembered how the tutor would take him to one of his lecturers.

She rang up [lecturer] and said 'Are you busy?' She'd say 'Well I've only got half an hour. 'She'd say 'Oh, great, we're on our way up now.' I was like 'No, I can't do it, I can't face her.' [Support Tutor] just dragged me upstairs to go and see her and we just sat down and just talked through what was going on. After this meeting there were no more problems. (Norman)

Tom talked about how his Tutor stood up for him:

I don't think I've ever used [Support Tutor] firstly as a safety net and secondly as an excuse, but I think she would stand up for me. I remember her standing up for me with [lecturer] when I had my problem with her. (Tom)

Daniel remembered his Tutor writing to academic staff and asking them to take his dyslexia into consideration.

She drafted a letter to all lecturers who taught me, telling the Examining Boards to make allowances for my dyslexia and to especially take it into consideration when marking my work. (Daniel)

The significance of the Tutor acting as an advocate is that it is raising awareness of this disability with academic staff, which helps to challenge the negative stereotypes that exist towards disability within society. The value of this approach

suggests that dyslexics can achieve academic success with appropriate help and support. Jenny supports this view after talking with one lecturer.

It was [lecturer], he said that 'There are a lot of students in education that have got dyslexia and still go on to get their degrees and do everything they wanted to do within their lives.' (Jenny)

Tom reinforced this view when he felt the work of the Tutor helped others to recognise that dyslexia exists:

Yeah I think [Support Tutor] being at the College means the College needs to accept that dyslexia does exist, even though some lecturers don't want to accept it or don't feel that they need the hassle. (Tom)

Through the Support Tutor being in place, it helps to acknowledge the fact that dyslexia does exist within the educational environment. With only one support Tutor being available it needs to be questioned how effective their help would be, especially if these individuals are trying to meet the needs of other dyslexic students at the College. Jane supports this view, for she felt it was difficult to arrange a support package because the Tutor was on her own:

I think it's very hard to approach [Support Tutor] for help at times because she is the only support lecturer at hand. I think it is really hard to put a specific package together, but if there was more support from lecturers the help would be better. (Jane)

Whether the Tutor was able to provide enough help appeared to be an issue at College E, where the Support Tutor felt she could not provide appropriate support to Simon and Jane because she did not have enough time, due to the extent of her other commitments. The problem with this scenario is that a dyslexic could be reluctant about seeking help, or may only ask for help in certain areas because he realises that the Tutor is busy. Therefore, she would not want to be viewed as a problem. Tom talked about being reluctant to ask for help because the Tutor was always busy:

Sometimes I am reluctant about asking for help because [Support Tutor] is based in such a busy environment with lecturers coming in and out of the room and people are always asking her questions at the same time as well. At times you question the point of seeing her because you realise she will be busy. (Tom)

Jane reinforced this view:

When I go to see [Support Tutor] she is always so busy. I know one of the reasons why is because she teaches all the special needs kids at the College. This and her other commitments at times make me feel quite reluctant to come and hassle her. (Jane)

There are other reasons why these respondents were reluctant about seeking help, such as not wanting to be perceived as someone different by their peers, but it does need to be questioned why some Colleges would only have one support tutor in place for helping this group? One possible explanation maybe that they cannot determine, from one academic year to the next, how many dyslexic students they will have, so it might be difficult to warrant financial expenditure. This to an extent is understandable, but determining the students' educational experience on the basis of available financial resources has the potential to prevent the individual from having a positive experience of education. This raises the question about what is the point of discovering whether the individual is dyslexic if they are not able to receive appropriate support because of the lack of funding.

The availability of a Support Tutor is a step in the right direction. If these individuals were not in place it is likely that dyslexia would not be recognised, which increases the chances of an individual dyslexic failing, and previous poor educational experiences being repeated. However, if *access* opportunities are to be increased, there seems to be an increased need for more Support staff. Even with a Support Tutor being in place, the way in which a dyslexic would come into contact with this individual needs to be explored. It seems an individual, who is already aware of their dyslexia, is more likely to seek support and, therefore, achieve

academic success, more so than someone who discovers their dyslexia through their return to education. This is unfair because they risk their educational experiences on a chance meeting with an aware member of staff.

10:5 Discussion

The next stage of Grounded Theory analysis is to provide explanations for the respondent experiences of support whilst on *access*. A substantive explanation for this category was that some dyslexic students were able to have an improved experience of *access* than others because of the support they were receiving. Some of the respondents mainly had a positive experience of support because on the whole it allowed them to access the subjects they were studying. However, there were examples from the respondents' experiences that they could not access specific support, or the help they accessed was of no use to them with their studies, as well as not disclosing the fact that they were receiving support to their friends.

The problem with the support equipment was that not all the respondents could gain access to a computer to help them with their studies. And, when they did, there was little help and support for the respondents in getting used to these machines or dealing with any problems. Recognition of the value of using a computer is reflected by one of the dyslexic students used as a vignette by the National Working Party on Dyslexia (1999), which can be applied to *access*:

He finds a computer invaluable. He uses the thesaurus by using a synonym he can spell to find the word he wants. Keith (p.32).

A computer can, therefore, help the individual to cope with the requirements of *access*, such as essay writing.

Whether a dyslexic is able to gain access to a computer is dependent on whether the Institution already has such equipment in place and if they are prepared to

loan out such equipment to students. There is also an emphasis on the respondents being aware of the value of computers to help them with their studies. In contrast, Tom, Jane, Simon and Norman had to rely on their family, or the College Information Technology provision available for all students. Therefore, being already aware of dyslexia placed the respondents in a much stronger position than the individuals who discovered that they were dyslexic whilst on *access*. They were probably more aware of the support strategies available to them, via pre *access* experiences, which clearly helps the individual to be more aware of their rights and entitlements. However, being fortunate enough to already be aware of dyslexia and selecting the right College does not guarantee that the respondents will be able to successfully start using a computer. Hall and Tinklin (1998) recognises this problem through stating that it is necessary for disabled students to receive training and ongoing technical support if they are to make effective use of this piece of equipment. The problem with receiving little help is that the individuals will not feel confident to use Information Technology and, therefore, lose out on the value that this provision can provide to their studies.

The availability of some support equipment, such as a dictaphone, can help to create further barriers which prevent the respondents from having an even more successful experience of *access*. The dictaphone did not actually help them with their studies, but instead increased their workload (Riddick et al, 1997). As well, the use of a dictaphone helped to reinforce the feeling of difference between the respondent and their peers. By recognising the difficulties in using a dictaphone it is important to consider why these problems have arisen and what they mean for the individual student.

The difficulties in using a dictaphone seem to be more focussed in the way it is used than the piece of equipment itself. This is reflected through the dictaphone being used to record a lecture as a whole instead of key points. This barrier is

clearly difficult to overcome, because how would a student be able to anticipate additional comments from students and staff? And because of the concern of not wanting to miss anything important, it is more likely that the dyslexic respondents will try to record everything. With students being overwhelmed by the amount of information they have to record anyway, it is likely that these individuals may be put off from using this piece of equipment. A responsibility is, therefore, on Support Services to show dyslexic students how to use a dictaphone effectively with their studies. National Working Party on Dyslexia (1999) echoes a similar point through recognising that training should be provided to dyslexic students on how to use this piece of equipment. Another difficulty is concern about looking different to their peers. The concern about looking different may result in the respondents not using a dictaphone and missing out on important information which could reduce their chance of achieving academic success. The concern reflected by the respondents also suggests that they fear their peers would represent society's negative attitude towards disability which would result in these individuals feeling excluded within the *access* environment.

The respondents also recalled the concern about telling their friends outside *access* that they were receiving support. The concern centred around the fact that their peers would treat them differently. Whilst only one respondent highlighted this concern, it again reveals that the lack of knowledge about dyslexia is an important part of the student experience, whether it is in College or not. Norman was concerned that once his friends found out that he was dyslexic and receiving support that they would display a negative attitude. This concern could result in this individual, and others in a similar position, not feeling close to their peers, which may result in them feeling outside of the friendship groups. The lack of understanding about dyslexia may result in the individual forming closer relations with fellow dyslexics because they are the only individuals who understand their support needs.

Moving towards a more conceptual explanation of the respondents' experiences of support whilst on *access*, it appears that some Colleges are better than others in meeting the needs of dyslexic students. Some Institutions had more experience of supporting dyslexic students and individuals from other non-traditional groups enrolled on *access* and other educational programmes. This is reflected through some of the respondents being able to receive a computer to help them with their studies and the time taken to arrange a support package. The effect of this variation is that there is no guarantee that a dyslexic student would receive consistent support from one College to another. To an extent this variation is understandable, as Colleges were designed to meet the needs of their local community. Therefore, if there are no dyslexics living within the local area or if those that are, are unaware of their disability, it is hardly surprising that an Institution does not have the provision in place to meet the needs of this group.

The issue of funding could explain why there was a variation in provision available to this group, for it is difficult to anticipate the number of dyslexics enrolling on programmes such as *access*. The Kennedy Report (FEFC, 1997) recognised the need to provide additional funding to widen participation if access opportunities into Further Education are to be increased. Furthermore, if there are no support staff in place, it is likely that a student with this disability would not receive appropriate help, therefore, not achieve the academic success of which they are capable. These barriers could explain why the respondents looked to a combination of support from the support tutor, family, friends and a partner to help them achieve academic success.

It is now important to consider what these developments mean for dyslexic people wishing to return to education through *access*. Taking into consideration the

variation in support it seems some Colleges are better than others in meeting the support needs of dyslexic students. As highlighted by Corbett (1999):

Guidelines from the FEFC on how to calculate additional support are highly complicated and can be widely interpreted by different Colleges. (p.186).

The level of support a dyslexic student experiences is probably dependent on how successful their selected Institution is in accessing FEFC funding. However, it is also likely that individuals who are aware of their dyslexia beforehand are in a better position than those who discover their disability whilst on *access*. This is because they can ask the right questions which will help them to determine whether or not their selected Institution is able to meet their needs. This is in contrast to the respondents who discover they are dyslexic whilst on *access*. They are dependent on the support package their selected institution already has in place. And, with *access* being a year long it is likely that the respondents may have to accept available help, or do without, because it would take too long to put any help in place. Also, the lack of consistent and standardised support results in student choice being restricted to specific Institutions, which itself can discourage dyslexic people from improving their lives through returning to education.

It is now necessary to link the Substantive and Formal Theories together, into a more general explanation that suggests dyslexic students require support if they are to compete on an equal footing with non-dyslexic people within society. There is an emphasis within society on communicating with the written word, and dyslexic people may fail to meet this requirement. When a dyslexic deviates, within the educational context, support may be provided to enable the individual to return to the system, therefore, successfully progressing through school to the working world. Thus the availability of support is a powerful tool influencing

whether a dyslexic person is included into the wider society, therefore, enabling them to meet their full potential.

The picture that emerges is that there is some support in place at each participating Institution to help dyslexics to achieve academic success. However, it is noticeable that some Colleges are better than others in meeting the needs of this group. The positive experience of support mainly came from working with a Support Tutor on a one-to-one basis. This positive encounter occurred because the participants realised that these staff are available to help them. However, the respondents encountered a less than positive experience in the case of support equipment such as computers. In some cases, to improve the level of support, the respondents turned to their family or partner. Thus, it is important to recognise that the availability of support can make all the difference between whether or not an individual dyslexic is able to achieve academic success. And that, the level of support a dyslexic student can expect is very much dependent on the College which they select.

Chapter 11 "I enjoyed some access subjects more than others."

Experiences of the academic elements of access

11: 1 Experiences of the work and study environment

11:1:1 Studying within the Library

When exploring the respondent experiences of the work and study environment they talked about studying within the Library. Three of the respondents talked about the library being a good environment to study in:

There are also areas in the Library where you can work together or on your own. I think there's about 6 tables where you can discuss things together about the subjects we are studying. It is a really good environment to study in. (Daniel)

Simon and Jane reinforced this view:

The Library was very quiet, with very little interruption. It was not really busy at all. It was usually a few places well away from the computers and other areas. It was a really nice environment to work in. (Simon)

It was a dead quiet place to work in and you could really think in there as well. The times when I used the Library I managed to get a lot of work done, when deadlines were really tight. (Jane)

Three of the respondents also talked about the library being a good place for relevant material:

The Library is old but saying that it is quite good. There's always been the relevant text and references available. Being able to get the books from there has really helped at times. (Daniel)

He also felt it was the place to gain relevant research:

When I have had to write extended essays the Library has been really good because I have always been able to obtain and lay my hands on all relevant data /research/ text. It has saved me time

from going elsewhere which has helped to improve my grades.
(Daniel)

Jane and James supported this positive experience:

The Library was good. I would normally go into the Library when I needed to get an essay together because it would be a good chance to get together and lay my hands on a range of books that I normally could never get hold of. They had a great dictionary in there as well, which helped when I had difficulty in spelling a word. (Jane)

The Library was OK. It had a good selection of materials in it which really helped when I had to write essays. In fact the Library was better than I expected it to be. It was also a good opportunity to meet other people. (James)

The respondents enjoyed studying within the Library because it was a quiet place to work in. They needed the quiet environment to concentrate and work effectively in because they could not work elsewhere. This is understandable because the respondents may not have found their home environment a quiet place to study in because of the commitments to their partner or to other members of their family.

I had to study within the Library because it was the only quiet place that I could study within. I always remembered it was a nightmare to study whilst at home. (James)

The need to study within a quiet environment is a requirement for dyslexic and non-dyslexic students. The opportunity to come together may help to increase knowledge about dyslexia, and therefore, challenge the negative attitudes towards this disability.

11:1:2 Studying within the Support Centre

Nearly all the respondents talked about their experiences of studying within the Support Centre. Three of the respondents felt the Support Centre was a distracting environment to work in:

It gets really noisy at times, especially when the foreign students are in there. They shout and talk in short bursts, which makes it really difficult, especially when your're trying to sound words. It's difficult because they are miles away from home and stick together as one big group, which make it very hard to concentrate whilst you are working. (Tom)

James and Daniel supported this view:

When there's a lot of people around in the [Support Unit] I end up talking to them as well. It's good at times, but can also be really distracting. [Support Unit] is alright to work in, if you are not in a rush with your work, but if your're getting close to a deadline I couldn't really use it. (James)

No it's distracting, in fact very distracting at times. You have a range of disabled students with various disabilities because [College C] is opened up to a lot of people with severe disabilities. When you have a lot of people creating noise and distraction it is not a good environment to study in. (Daniel)

Some of the respondents also talked about a good experience of working within the Support Unit:

When I have gone to work in the [Support Unit] it has been a really good environment to study in because you have help available and the computers to help you to type up your essays. When I am at College this is probably the best environment to study in. (Jenny)

James and Daniel reinforced this view:

Study Support has got a good base to study, apart from when you use equipment such as the printer. For some reason the College can't get a good printer they have changed it a load of times but it's tricky. (James)

If I took a piece of work to [Support unit] and say 'Can you just check it?' They could literally do it there and then. Or you can actually get assistance within 5 or 10 minutes. Either of these options has been really good. Both of these options have really helped when I have been looking to hand in essays. (Daniel)

These responses show that the respondents had positive and negative experiences of working within the Support Unit. It seems this experience was very much dependent on what the individual wanted to use it for. If the individual wanted to use the unit for studying purposes they might not be able to, because of noise levels. However, if the respondents are attending the Unit for pastoral reasons – or for equipment use or proof reading - they are more likely to have a successful experience. One explanation that was provided by Daniel for these mixed experiences is the design of their Support Unit, which for the majority of the Colleges was open plan. The advantage of such a design is that it helps to create an inclusive environment because, with these Units being open to non-disabled students, it is trying to create the picture that both groups are no different to each other. Through services being available to disabled and non-disabled students it suggests dyslexia is not, as such, an issue. So possibly the mixing of both groups helps to raise and increase awareness of dyslexia within and outside the educational environment. Showing how dyslexia affects the individual within the academic environment which can help to further knowledge of this disability when dyslexic and non-dyslexic people return to the wider society. The disadvantage of this approach is based around the individual having difficulty in coming to terms with their dyslexia:

Sometimes when I was in Study Support, I did not want anyone I knew seeing me there, because they may wonder why I was there. I have never been asked, but the concern was always in the back of my mind. (Daniel)

The respondents possibly feared that the open plan design may result in them being noticed by their peers and, therefore, being perceived as someone different, which was a concern reflected during the early stages of the research. But if they are it is possible that relationships could be formed because the individuals using this service would have something in common.

11:2 Experiences of the classroom environment

11:2:1 Enjoyed the classroom

When exploring the respondents' experiences they identified two positive aspects of the classroom environment. The first area was enjoying the small student group size. Norman remembered enjoying studying within small groups in the classroom.

When we did small group work it was really wonderful because we would all be working together. You would just sit and listen to the lecturer and write down as much as you can, where I would get down all the key points. I would just try and focus as much as I can on the guy who is talking, which helped me to understand the subject material. (Norman)

Daniel, Jenny and Tom supported this view:

We would have days where it would only be five or six of us in the class, where we would all interact with the lecturer. It was very effective because we found out a lot more about the subject we are learning about in a couple of hours than in previous lessons. So I would definitely argue the case that the less number of students the more you would actually benefit. (Daniel)

Sometimes on the Contemporary Social Studies course last year there was only six of us in the class. During the break we would all get together and have a good discussion about what we have been taught over a cup of coffee and at times the teacher would join us as well. We would have picked the whole subject apart during these breaks and throughout the lesson. It was these sessions that were really good because I learnt a lot. (Jenny)

The small sessions were great because you get more individual attention than you would gain if the classes were bigger. You can get the time to ask more questions and link more ideas together, which helped to improve my learning experience. (Tom)

Some of the respondents also enjoyed studying in larger groups. James talked about enjoying studying in large groups because it increased the chance of better debates:

I think I'd sooner be in a larger class, but saying that it would depend on whether or not the debate would be good. This is because the bigger the group, the more opinions you would get, which would be great when we are considering an issue. But when I look back at my experiences, certain amounts of people don't like to talk, so it is a no win situation. (James)

Jenny and Jane supported this view.

In some groups it was better to discuss certain issues within a big group, such as Psychology, because it was such a big subject to discuss. You would be able to hear everyone's opinion, which helped me to learn and develop an understanding. (Jenny)

When we have about 13 students or more I find it a lot better because there is a variety of information being expressed and a whole range of ideas. These groups are a lot better to relate to, because we are all learning. (Jane)

These responses show that the respondents enjoyed studying within the classroom environment for a range of reasons, possibly because they wanted to achieve different things from this experience. The respondents enjoyed the larger group sizes because they could gain new ideas, comments and thoughts on the subjects that were being discussed. Whereas, the respondents also enjoyed the small class sizes because they received individual attention from their lecturers. It is possibly through a mixture of both these methods that the respondents felt they could concentrate more on their subject material, therefore, improve their learning experience.

The small groups I was in were really good because it was a good opportunity to focus on the subject material that we were learning. This was a lot better than the bigger groups, because there was more

people, therefore more distraction because of the questions they would ask. (Daniel)

Through these small class sizes the respondents felt more confident about asking questions and participating within classroom discussion, this is because they would be less embarrassed if they got something wrong because of the small class size. Another advantage of studying in small classes was that it helped to develop relations between the respondent and their peers, as Norman recalled:

The small classes helped a lot because it was a lot more personal between yourselves and fellow students. It was a bonding kind of thing because it was a really good opportunity to meet fellow people and make friends. (Norman)

An advantage of these relationships developing is that both groups look to each other for support to help them through their course. Jane remembered how you learned from each other in the small classes:

It was OK. Actually I think that the small class sizes were better because a lot of the time we learned from each other. The smaller sessions were opportunities for my peers and myself to express our own opinions, which was good because the lecturer would expand on them as well. (Jane)

The significance of working within large or small class sizes is that the respondents may feel less different, therefore, more included within this environment which may lead to a more positive educational experience. As some of the respondents remembered that they also enjoyed large class sizes, it suggests that they wanted various things from their classroom experience. They found that the large group discussion helped them with their learning of the subject material. It is possibly through large classes that the respondents developed a general understanding and that they gained a more in-depth knowledge in the small sized classes.

The next positive experience the respondents had of the classroom environment was the opportunity to give presentations. Norman remembers his positive experience:

All the oral presentations I have done have been really good because it was a good opportunity for me to show my knowledge of the subject we were studying. It was at times like this that I felt no different to my peers. (Norman)

James, Jane, Tom and Daniel remember similar positive experiences:

I have done loads of presentations whilst on *access*. I suppose this is because I feel ok with talking to my fellow students. The reason why I feel OK is because I have written things down and then read them out. (James)

I have no problems at all in talking to anybody about anything. I suppose this is why I like giving presentations, because whether I am right or wrong I do not mind being embarrassed about it and in fact I would rather be corrected than laughed at. It doesn't bother me speaking to anyone I really enjoy it. (Jane)

I do not have any difficulty at all in giving presentations in any of my subjects. This is because I can do the pre-preparation at home in my own time. I mean I did a presentation for a study skills session which was all in my own time. (Tom)

As far as your presentation work goes it has always been very good. As we have progressed through *access* we have always had the opportunity to do our presentations to the rest of our peers. (Daniel)

These respondents enjoyed giving presentations because it allowed them to play to their strengths - communicating subject material verbally rather than in a written form. Another advantage of this approach was that they could prepare for their presentation beforehand, therefore, reduce the chance of errors through their own efforts or support of a partner, member of the family or Support Tutor. Through displaying their knowledge via a presentation, the respondents functioned on a more equal footing academically to their peers.

11:2:2 Has difficulty with the classroom

When exploring the respondents' experiences further they talked about difficulties within the classroom. Their experiences mainly focussed around the difficulty participating. James talked about his difficulty:

I always had difficulty copying things down from the blackboard which is always really annoying. I am copying down the characters but not taking the information in because I am writing so fast. (James)

Daniel and Tom supported this view:

I think I have said to you before that I have had difficulty within the classroom. One of the main problems I have is taking information down from an overhead projector because it is difficult at times to keep up with the writing. (Daniel)

Yes, I have always had difficulty taking information down from the blackboard because the lecturer would rub off the information from the blackboard before I had written it all down. If it wasn't for [respondent's wife] I would have been up the street a bit. (Tom)

Tom goes onto provide a further example.

Yes, the blackboards are hopeless, they ought to be scrapped. You get a set of windows at the side you are sitting on and you cannot read anything, and if its white on black it is even worse. (Tom)

These responses show that the respondents could not keep up with their course because teaching styles were too fast. The problem with these teaching styles being too fast is that the respondents become anxious because they fear that they are falling behind in their studies, which may result in them thinking previous poor educational experiences are being repeated. The difficulty with trying to keep up is that the respondents will probably have jumbled notes and, therefore, not learn anything. Jane recalled this particular experience with one *access* subject:

When I dropped down to the second year Psychology, I still had difficulty keeping up, especially when there was a lot of dictation. I could not keep up, my notes were really jumbled, which did not help when I had to learn from them. (Jane)

The problem with being taught quickly is that it also results in the individual feeling that they cannot understand the subject material, as Jane recalled:

By the time I got home and tried to read my notes about the lecture I had that day, I could not understand them at all. I suppose it did not help when I could not read my handwriting, but the main problem I found was that I felt I was not learning anything. (Jane)

She also recalled not being able to understand lectures:

I might as well not be bothered about going in, because I would not grasp anything within the lectures. I was feeling that I was not going anywhere! When it came to writing four essays, I did not know anything about them so there was no point in carrying on. (Jane)

Daniel felt he could not interact with his lecturers in the lesson because he was busy writing.

You are busy writing down what the lecturers are talking about, but because you are doing this you cannot interact with that lecturer effectively, because you are busy writing. You are missing out, which obviously means that you're not getting the best from your lecturer. (Daniel)

The problem with feeling that they are not learning anything is that these individuals feel excluded within the classroom environment. This leads to increased feelings of difference between the respondent and their peers. Bearing in mind the background of *access* students, whether they are disabled or not, this raises the question why is the subject material being taught quickly? The answer would possibly be that there is too much material to be taught within a year, which results in the subject material being packed in, as Tom recalled.

One of the common complaints of *access* by us all was that we were being taught too much. It was just so much for us all to learn within a year. I certainly felt stretched! (Tom)

The difficulty with being taught quickly is that *access* students would feel under pressure.

The problem with this approach is that with *access* students being out of education for different periods of time, it is clearly going to be a struggle for lecturers to bring the individuals up to the required academic standard. Attempts to help dyslexics overcome the difficulty of keeping up is possibly through the use of a dictaphone, but as has already been shown, with the respondents' experiences of support, this form of equipment seemed to hinder, instead of to help the student academically. And with the respondents also fearing that they will stand out, it is also understandable that they do not use such equipment. One option available would be for lecturers to provide their lecture notes. The advantage of this option is that it would allow the individual to concentrate on learning the subject material and asking any questions. The effect of such an approach is that it suggests awareness of the learning needs of students from non-traditional groups and helps to create an inclusive educational environment.

11:3 Experiences of examinations

Daniel recalled not taking up the extra time available to him for examinations.

I haven't asked for extended time available for me. It has discouraged me because I don't feel that there is any justified reason why I should have it, because I view it as an advantage over the rest of the students. (Daniel)

Tom was aware that he had extra time, but did not need it:

I realise that I can have extra time to help me with my exams, but up till now there has not been the necessity to have it. However, I know that I have always been able to. (Tom)

Simon reinforced this view:

I was allowed extra time for Maths, but in the end I didn't need it because I managed to get everything done in time. At this College they have been pretty generous here with the extra-time, so I do not worry about the time too much. (Simon)

James felt the extra time was not enough for him to go through his work.

Yes I used the extra time right up to the last minute of the exams I have had to sit. In fact I have never sat there with ten minutes to spare. I am entitled to 25% extra time for all my exams, but I always felt that was still not enough time for me really. Because I have never had the chance to go through my essays afterwards the grammar is always terrible because I am under so much pressure. (James)

Jenny remembered using the extra time to calm her down.

The value I found with the extra time I had was that I managed to use it to calm myself down a bit. Through my calming myself down I was able to bring myself back down to normality, so I could concentrate on my work. (Jenny)

These responses show that the respondents had different attitude towards the extra time available to them, perhaps because they used it for different things. These attitudes towards extra time are possibly explained by each respondent having a different attitude towards their dyslexia. It seems some of the respondents, who take-up extra time, such as James and Jenny, do not mind being perceived as different to their peers, whereas, the other respondents such as Daniel, Tom and Simon did. These individuals may not have decided to take up the extra time for a range of reasons. One immediate explanation would be that they did not require the extra-time to help them with the examined subjects, this is because they already have the strategies in place or confidence in their academic abilities. It is also important to consider why Daniel thought it was a disadvantage to have extra time. A possible explanation maybe that he did not want to be

perceived as different from his peers. Daniel was concerned that they would ask him about the extra-time, which may lead to a discovery of dyslexia.

It refers directly back to not disclosing the dyslexia to the rest of the students, as the main reason why I have not taken up the provision of extra time. So far today I have not had any extension on any exam that I have taken. (Daniel)

This respondent felt that because of the examinations occurring towards the end of his studies that there was no point in disclosing his disability.

It also seems when extra-time was used it helped, in various contexts, to allow the respondents to focus on their studies. This is achieved through the extra time helping to place the dyslexic on a "level playing field" with their non-disabled peers, therefore, hopefully providing them with the same chance of achieving academic success within an exam. It is also important to remember that the extra time does not eradicate the dyslexia, so it may still be necessary to take this into consideration when a lecturer is marking the exam script. This again raises the issue of awareness and whether or not the marker has any knowledge of dyslexia and how it affects the individual within the educational environment. Whilst extra time is most welcome, it does also need to be questioned if this provision helps the respondent to display their knowledge of the examined subject? It would seem unlikely because an examination is asking the dyslexic to communicate their knowledge of the tested subject in the form with which they have difficulty. So could the provision of extra-time be viewed as an attempt to integrate the individual into the educational environment? If so, is this form of assessment setting up the individual to fail, because it is unlikely that they will meet their potential unless they have developed effective strategies? Recognition of this fact has already occurred through the availability of the viva, which is an opportunity for the individual to display their knowledge of particular subjects, orally. This form of assessment would also be relevant for non-disabled students because with

both groups coming from similar non-traditional backgrounds it could be an alternative tool to assess their knowledge, which would help in reintroducing them back into the educational environment. The value of this alternative method of assessment is that it helps to create an inclusive educational environment, which helps to widen access to this sector.

11: 4 Experiences of writing essays

11:4:1 Took time to get used to writing essays

When exploring the respondents' experiences of writing essays, they talked about the time it took for them to put a piece of work together. Jenny remembered how long it took her to write an essay:

I think I can normally write an essay in about four days, with putting in four to five hours a day in researching, preparing and putting it together. But then I might not even like the essay, which would result in my tearing it up and starting again. If I do not stick at the essay it would take me weeks, because I lose interest. (Jenny)

Jane and Daniel recalled similar experiences.

I would worry about the time it would take for me to write an essay especially when I had only got a week left to get it in. There have been a couple of times as well when I've done an essay the night before because I always tried to put it off. (Jane)

The problem I have had is when I have had difficulty at finishing off the essay, which has really tested me so much at times, because everything has had to focus around getting the essay in. (Daniel)

It took the respondents a long time because they could not cope with the specific requirements of writing an essay, such as organising and expressing their thoughts on paper. The problem with this is that early on the respondents may get behind in their studies, therefore, they develop the feeling that they cannot cope with their studies. These particular experiences may result in the individual feeling different

to their peers, which again results in a feeling of exclusion being created. It is also important to consider whether the time taken is also because the respondents were getting used again to studying, which, if so, would not non-dyslexic students display similar difficulties? This is possibly part of the explanation why the respondents take their time, which may also suggest why lecturers do not recognise dyslexia, because they are more likely to attribute any difficulties to getting used to studying again.

Another possible explanation why the respondents took their time was because they had difficulty expressing themselves on paper, as James recalled:

One of the biggest problems that I have is getting everything down on paper, especially when I am writing an essay. The situation is especially worst when I am under pressure to get an essay in. It is getting my thoughts onto the paper that creates the biggest problem. (James)

Jenny, Jane Daniel Simon and Norman remember similar experiences:

I'd always get my words muddled up when I was trying to write down on paper what I was trying to say, which did not really help when I was trying to write an essay. This did not help as well, when I would take down what the lecturer was trying to say and use it within my essays. (Jenny)

Before and after I had just started access I would write an essay with a capital letter at the start and finish with a full stop. This problem and my difficulty in expressing myself on paper did not help at all. (Jane)

I've found a difficulty rearranging the information that I am using for an essay. The problem with this is that it just takes more time to put an essay together when I am trying to express my thoughts on paper. (Daniel)

It was easy enough to get the information that I needed to write an essay, but when it came to writing it, this was more of a problem because I would always have difficulty trying to organise and express myself on paper. (Simon)

It would be hard graft trying to write an essay, even when I would get lots of help. The whole essay writing thing was something that I did not enjoy because I had problems putting down what I wanted to say on paper, but its something that had to be done. (Norman)

When writing essays, the problem is that the respondents have difficulty in expressing their knowledge, thoughts and ideas about a particular subject in the required format. This is understandable because the individual is being asked to communicate in a format with which they have difficulty. James provides a good example of the difficulty:

My essays are a bit like shopping lists, which is obviously wrong, but it is one of the characteristics of my dyslexia. I cannot explain how and why I cannot express myself correctly in the form that is required, but it can be tedious and annoying. (James)

The problem with this essay based approach to displaying knowledge is that the respondents become frustrated because they are not achieving good marks, which resulted in them feeling different from their peers. This frustration is based around not being able to express their knowledge in a similar fashion, which would possibly lead to them feeling excluded within the educational environment. This negative experience may also lead to the individual dropping out, because they may develop the impression that they cannot achieve academic success.

The only option available to respondents is to develop strategies themselves or through the support of others, that would allow them to overcome the difficulties they face when expressing themselves on paper. James remembered working with the Support Tutor to help him plan and organise his essays.

When I saw [Support tutor] we would work on a whole range of things such as essay plans and mind mapping. I turned to him because he was the only person who could really help me. Yes, it

was mainly essay plans and how to mind map essays that he taught me. (James)

Jenny recalled a similar experience:

When I write an essay I tend to do a big plan at the start, so I have an idea about what I am writing, then after that I tend to mind map the essay, which allows me to be more organised. It was [Support Tutor] who showed me how to do this, which helped to improve my essays. (Jenny)

Some of the respondents also talked about taking notes to help them write essays:

My way of coping with writing an essay is to take as many notes as possible. The more I could get down on paper the more I can remember, which really helps when I am looking for information about what I am writing. (Jenny)

She also talked about writing up notes at home as part of the strategy:

When I went home I would re-write my notes again from the lectures I attended that day. It was more information going in because it had gone in three times, the talk by the teacher, you writing it down, and then again. It helped me to learn and know which material was important for my essays. (Jenny)

Daniel recalled similar experiences:

It isn't easy to keep up with the more in-depth subjects, which I have to keep referring back to such as Psychology and Biochemistry. There is just so much to write down for these subjects, which are also very alien to me. To help me understand these subjects, I write these notes up at home again, which is useful when I am having to write essays, because I have a better idea where everything is. (Daniel)

He also talked about word processing his notes:

So what I have done in the most part for the second semester is when I got home I would, after writing my notes up at home, then word process them as well, which would be really useful for reference. (Daniel)

The significance of these strategies are that they help the individual to compete on an "level playing field" with their peers, and therefore, hopefully to achieve academic success. This goal seems achievable because some of the respondents felt more confident in writing essays after they put some of these approaches into practice:

If I was given an essay to write now I would feel more confident now than I did before I came here. As the course progressed I have got more of an idea of what they wanted, which helps, but at times I still don't know if I have enough ability to actually give them what they want. (James)

My standard of understanding what is expected of me and the content has improved as the course progressed. I feel more comfortable with my essay writing now because I know what is expected as in format, layout, leading one paragraph to another, research. (Daniel)

The importance here is that if the individual is to learn these strategies, it is very much dependent on a chance meeting with a support tutor, member of a family or friend, who has experience of expressing themselves on paper and is prepared to show the respondent such approaches.

11:4:2 Important to be able to re-submit essays

Respondents felt it was important to be able to re-submit; this was an opportunity to achieve academic success.

Definitely, I mean I've resubmitted work and it's been at Level 3, whereas before I hand it in has been at level 2, but it is level 3 you need to be achieving because this is the A level standard. Now, because my quality of work has improved, I know that if I get it back the chances of me resubmitting successfully are odds on. (Daniel)

Yes, it is an advantage to re-submit because when you're working on credits, it gives you another chance. So if you don't make the grade

first time you still have the chance to get your access certificate.
(Jane)

The option to re-submit is good because it is an opportunity to put right the things I did wrong in the first attempt, such as not putting the argument in. (Jenny)

These responses show that re-submission was a relatively positive experience because it increased the opportunity of achieving academic success. This option was available because it acknowledged the learning needs of *access* students. It is recognising that these individuals will not automatically achieve the necessary academic standard, therefore, the re-submission option is providing the individual with a second chance, which helps to create an inclusive environment. The value of this approach is that it is helping to increase access to the subject material for these individuals, therefore, improving their experience of the educational environment.

The respondents also valued the re-submission option because it showed the respondents where they are going wrong, as Daniel recalled:

So, resubmission not only gives you an opportunity of doing that and learning from your mistakes, which individuals make anyway because they've got onto the wrong track; you also benefit because you're going over the subjects the second time. (Daniel)

Jenny supports this view:

Yes I do use the chance to re-submit an essay because I have the pointers where I have gone wrong, so in the next draft I have the option to put my previous mistakes right. So in one respect I am learning from my mistakes, which helps me to learn. (Jenny)

These responses show that recognising your mistakes helps the individual within the learning process, it helps to develop a feeling of confidence. This is because the option to re-submit is an opportunity to identify your academic strengths and weaknesses, as Daniel recalled:

You have to overcome the embarrassment of having to resubmit your work because it is an opportunity to identify your strengths and weaknesses, which helps you to identify the areas to focus on for when you hand the essay back in and for further ones. (Daniel)

This would obviously lead to the individual being encouraged to focus or put further effort into their studies.

Another important part of the respondent being able to re-submit essays was that their lecturers would provide them with feedback on their work. Jane felt this feedback was important:

If they have covered the essay material in a lecture which they normally did, we would speak about it and they would tell me to read through my lecture notes again and then go away and redo it. This helped because I would find out where I was going wrong when I started the essay again. (Jane)

Jenny recalled a similar experience.

I think that was one of the most helpful things out after you handed your essay in, the lecturer would give you feedback, which would identify where you have gone wrong, such as not putting your argument in. I would use their feedback, with the other material that I had, as a guide to rewrite my essay. (Jenny)

It is possibly through this guidance that the respondents develop the confidence to carry on with their studies, because they feel their lecturers recognise their learning needs; they are taking an interest in their academic progress; and it is through this encouragement that the participants attend lectures.

11: 5 Experiences of access subjects

11:5:1 Some access subjects were better than others

When exploring the respondent experiences they talked about some subjects being better than others, as James remembered:

Yep, I had my own favourite subjects. English I thought was garbage, but I really liked Psychology. I suppose it was the teachers and their approaches that made all the difference. (James)

Norman, Jane, Jenny Daniel and Simon had similar positive experiences:

Yes I had my favourite subjects. One of them was Biology because the lecturer was very nice and the materials we used were interesting. I also enjoyed English as a subject as well because I had the opportunity to write. However, I did find Psychology boring. (Norman)

I certainly had my favourite subjects whilst on *access*. I enjoyed Sociology more than Psychology, because I could understand it, in fact it was a hell of a lot easier to understand than Psychology. (Jenny)

Yes, I definitely had my favourite subjects. I think the one I enjoyed the most was Psychology, in fact I absolutely adored it. I have got a bookcase with like ten books on Psychology. When I did the exam last year I got a level 3 and I was over the moon. (Jenny)

I enjoyed some subjects more than others whilst on *access*. I think Psychology was the best one because I achieved my best credit, which really encouraged me. The subject I had difficulty with was Bio-chemistry where I achieved my worst credit. (Daniel)

I enjoyed a range of subjects whilst on *access*. I enjoyed English because it was an opportunity to write, which I had not really done before. I also liked History of Art, because I didn't realise how badly a lot of books were written. (Simon)

The respondents enjoyed these subjects because they were interested in them, which could be attributed to a range of explanations. One explanation maybe that the new subjects the respondents started, such as Psychology, they genuinely found interesting. Alternatively, the respondents are genuinely interested in the subject, possibly they have already achieved academic success within other subjects earlier within their education. On the other hand, the respondents enjoyed these subjects because they could identify with the subject material, therefore, they

felt similar positive experiences can be repeated. The teaching styles of individual lecturers could also make the subject material interesting. Obviously the significance of these explanations is that it helps to create a less intimidating learning environment, which results in the respondent feeling less different to their peers, therefore, wanting to participate within the classroom discussions.

When exploring the respondent experiences further they talked about the enjoyment of specific subjects encouraging them to work harder:

Yes, I think because I enjoyed Psychology, I worked a lot harder at the subject because I did not want to get any bad marks. This is in contrast to English, which I never really went to. One of the reasons why was because the teacher and I seemed to be from two different worlds. (James)

If I found the subject extremely interesting and I had a desire to know more about it, I would work a lot harder, which would be me reading 90% of the books. If I wasn't real interested in some subjects I would not bother and then soon switch off. (Daniel)

Yes, yes, definitely I would work a lot harder for the subjects I really enjoyed. And I've also tended to buy a lot more books and watch a lot more documentaries about it because I have wanted to do it. (Jenny)

It is possible that the interest the respondents have developed in these specific subjects encouraged them to work harder. The encouragement from the lecturer probably helped the individual to work harder with their *access* subjects because they did not want to let these individuals down. Alternatively, the help they are receiving from their Support Tutor is making the subjects they are studying more accessible, which encourages the individual to work harder. Probably combination of both explanations contributed towards the respondents enjoying learning again:

One thing I noticed about the subjects I enjoyed was that I started to enjoy learning, through reading as many books as possible about

what I had learnt and asking questions within lecturers; this was instead of me being told to take something as the truth. (Jenny)

Through this positive experience the respondents may begin to realise that they can achieve academic success, therefore, they develop confidence in their own academic abilities:

I have participated in every subject, I have never held back and have always tried to show an interest and learn from every subject. I would say the more confident you are, with any essay, the more you put into it. (Daniel)

James recalled a similar experience:

As I have progressed through *access* I have become a lot more confident about what I am required to do for *access*. In fact I am a lot more relaxed within the College environment because for the first time I am enjoying learning. (James)

If so, the respondents may start to question why they did not have such a positive experience earlier within their education? They will probably hold their previous teachers or parents responsible because they did not recognise dyslexia earlier within their lives.

When I discovered that I was dyslexic, I wondered, why it had not been noticed beforehand. I hold my teachers responsible for not recognising my dyslexia whilst I was at school. (Daniel)

The significance of discovering dyslexia at such a late stage of the respondents' lives, is that these individuals will be more aware of the need to find out whether or not any person is dyslexic at the earliest stage possible.

Some of the respondents also talked about not enjoying some of the *access* subjects they were studying. Jane remembered having difficulty with Psychology:

Yes, Psychology was the subject I had difficulty with, I don't know why I had a problem with it, but I just could not get any good marks.

At times I wondered if I was too old, or I was too stupid, to get my head round the subject. (Jane)

Simon, James and Daniel also experienced difficulty with some subjects:

Yes, I was worried about Maths the most, as well as English. I suppose I had a problem with Maths because I felt I just could not do it and what happened whilst I was at school. English was a concern, but because I could read and the course required A level standard English, I was less concerned. (Simon)

I suppose I stopped going to Maths because I could not do it and me avoiding it was a way of coping, I don't know. I just did not want to keep putting myself through the stress, and funnily enough, they did not kick me off the course when they found out I was not going. (James)

When it comes to certain topics, perhaps all topics, but certain topics, like Physiology and Bio-chemistry for me, they are very difficult subjects. This is possibly because they are very in-depth and that there is so much to learn when it comes to exams, which become very complicated that results in making it hard for me. (Daniel)

The respondents possibly found these subjects difficult because they did not find them interesting. One explanation maybe that the individuals had a negative experience of these subjects earlier within their education, which resulted in the respondents developing a fear that they would be viewed as "not academically capable," as Jane recalled.

I think at times, because I have difficulty with some of the subjects, that the lecturer and fellow students would view me as someone different. They don't really have any knowledge of the past, but it worries me that previous experiences will be repeated because I cannot actually get it from my head and onto paper. (Jane)

The reason why Jane felt different to her peers was because of her difficulty in expressing the knowledge and thoughts that she had about a particular subject on paper. Jane also probably thought that she would not receive any support to help

her to overcome the difficulties she would face. It would, therefore, be important to stress to the respondents that negative experiences are not going to be repeated. Alternatively, the respondents alternatively may have had difficulty with these subjects because of poor teaching styles. The problem here is that the individual lecturer's approach to teaching specific subjects may influence how interesting they are. As already mentioned the lecturer is possibly in a no win situation, because of the need to teach *access* within a year, therefore, the option to be flexible in their teaching styles maybe restricted. With *access* being a course designed for non-traditional groups it should be expected that they have knowledge of dyslexia and are taking this into consideration when teaching. If they do not, the respondent may feel that previous poor educational experiences will be repeated, as Jane remembered:

Basically she got rid of me by offering me to go down to a slower group. She said drop down to second year because they go at a slower pace, which will be less intense. It did turn out to be less intense, but it did not really work. I just felt my school experiences were occurring again. (Jane)

By not taking into consideration the needs of dyslexics, the respondents may not able to feel that they can achieve academic success therefore, feel different from their peers, which may result in them considering leaving the educational environment. One more explanation maybe that the respondents did not really have any prior knowledge of specific subjects, therefore, combined with the other pressures of returning to education they may have found the subjects difficult.

11:5:2 Helpful to have some knowledge of subjects before *access* started

Respondents felt it was useful to have some knowledge of subjects before *access* started:

For some of the subjects it would have been useful to have a basic knowledge beforehand. This would especially be the case when it comes to writing essays, because you need a clear understanding, which would help if you had prior knowledge. Certain topics, that would require this knowledge are Physiology, in which the mature students who had some nursing knowledge would have a clear advantage, but the same goes for me as well. (Daniel)

Tom, James, Jenny and Norman supported this view.

It doesn't hurt to have some knowledge of the subjects before you start, it helps you to develop a quicker understanding of what you are being taught. So I suppose I can understand them giving reading lists before degree courses start. (Tom)

Well I used to read Psychology and Sociology books before I started *access*, which helped when I started the course. When it came to Physics I also had a basic knowledge, especially as I'm a Star Trek fan. So I think a slight knowledge and interest does help. (James)

Yes, especially as far as Sociology is concerned, I think if I had have got a basic knowledge of the subject beforehand it would have helped. In fact I probably wouldn't have found it so difficult. (Jenny)

It would have been a good start, yes, to have some basic knowledge of the subjects that I was studying. If anything you have some idea of what you are getting into, which helps to get better marks sooner rather than later. (Norman)

The advantage of respondents having some knowledge of *access* subjects before they start is that their return to studying is not such a shock to the system, which increases the chances of them achieving academic success. When the respondents started *access* they probably relied on their previous educational and life experiences to help them to get used to studying again. Jenny recalled how the previous course that she undertook at College helped.

Well I think the previous [course] helped to prepare me for what I was required to do whilst on *access*, because I could always go back to the notes I had made there to help me, in the subjects I had a problem with. (Jenny)

Tom recalled finding out what was required before he started *access*:

Before we started *access* I remember finding out what reading materials we would be required to look at, which I would take home with me and try and read to get some understanding about what is required. I just thought such preparation would help me. (Tom)

It seems the respondents were prepared to adopt a range of strategies that would ease them back into studying, which was probably a similar approach adopted by their non-disabled peers. The pre-course preparation suggests that the respondents hope that it would increase their chances of them achieving academic success. Clearly the respondents have identified this return to education as an important opportunity to improve their life opportunities. Whatever strategies or approaches respondents adopted it is likely that they would feel they are on a steep educational learning curve.

11:6 Discussion

Having explored the respondents' experiences of the academic elements of *access*, it is now necessary to move towards providing a Grounded Theory (Substantive, Formal and Cumulative Theories) explanation of their programme within a critical social research approach.

A substantive explanation for the respondents' encounters is that the dyslexic students had a mixed experiences of the academic elements of *access* because of both the way in which they were taught, and learned, their selected subjects. The positive side to the respondents' experiences was their enjoying studying within the various College environments, such as the classroom, as well as extra-time for examinations. In contrast their negative encounters focussed around taking down information from the blackboard, the fear of standing out, and taking time to getting used to writing essays.

The respondents had a positive experience of studying within College locations such as the Library or classroom. The respondents' interactions within these environments meant their dyslexia was not an issue. Turning to the Library, the respondents had a positive experience because, in the activities required, such as searching for relevant books or studying results, dyslexia was not an issue. However, Riddick et al, (1997) found a different experience: they reported dyslexic students having difficulty in finding material within the Library. These differing experiences could be attributed to a range of factors such as layout of the Library, respondents having effective coping strategies in place, or dyslexia affecting the individuals differently. Whatever the explanation it shows that individual dyslexics' learning needs are different.

Moving on to the classroom, most respondents had positive experiences of giving presentations. These individuals enjoyed giving presentations, because it gave them the chance to display their knowledge of the subject material they had learnt. The National Working Party on Dyslexia (1999) reinforced the value of tool to display their knowledge of presentations for dyslexics, but recognised that it is not an ideal method for all as a subject material. Presentations can give dyslexic students an opportunity to display their strengths, instead of weaknesses, and that contributes towards the individual feeling no different, therefore more included. Further recognition of the value of oral communication for dyslexics is reflected through the respondents enjoying group discussion work. These methods of communication suggest that dyslexic students may not have difficulty in learning information, but in expressing their knowledge of subject material on paper.

Another positive experience of *access* is reflected through the availability of extra-time for the respondents when undertaking examinations. This particular provision helped the respondents because it increased the chance of a dyslexic

student achieving academic success, whether it is through helping to calm the individual down, or providing them with additional time to read through their work. Recognition of the value of extra time comes from Hall and Tinklin (1998) who discovered that disabled students used this provision for different reasons, such as helping to calm the individual down or stretch and to prevent the individual's muscles from going into spasm. The intention of extra time is therefore aiming to help a dyslexic student to compete on an "level playing field" with their peers (Herrington, 1996). It is also noticeable that some of the respondents did not use the provision of extra time to help them with their examinations. This is because the respondents did not need it, or feared that if they did use it others would perceive them as different. Hall and Tinklin (1998) recognised that many students, who used this provision, felt segregated from their fellow students. This is possibly reflected through dyslexic students being misperceived as having an advantage over fellow students by their peers and lecturers through the provision of extra time.

Other negative experiences the respondents encountered were concerned with processing and displaying their knowledge of subject material into written format. Another particular barrier was taking information down from the blackboard. As the respondent cannot take the information down accurately, it may also result in dyslexics not being able to fully understand and learn the subject material. As the respondents cannot keep up, it can result their feeling excluded within the classroom. Taking information down from blackboards is possibly a common difficulty faced by other disabled people, such as visually impaired students, who recalled lecturers continually writing and pointing to information on a blackboard (Low, 1996). The method of communicating subject material is therefore a key issue for many disabled students, whether or not they are dyslexic. The way in which subject material is presented can influence the level of academic success. And if *access* is to be able to meet the needs of groups such as disabled people:

...who might be excluded, disadvantaged, delayed or otherwise deterred by a need to qualify for entry in more conventional ways. (Parry 1996,p.3).,

there is clearly a need for lecturers to be more aware of the learning needs of disabled people.

Staff development would be one way to create recognition of the learning needs of this group. To an extent this is already in place with staff providing lecture notes as handouts or in alternative formats as part of good practice for all students, which was noted by some of the respondents. However, recognition of the need for a more formal and co-ordinated approach to staff development is reflected through responses to the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996). There are intentions to develop national standards for teachers and Learning Support staff in Further Education (Hurst, 1999).

The next barrier that the respondents faced was producing written format assignments such as essays. The main difficulty the respondents faced was that they had problems organising and expressing themselves on paper, which resulted in them taking greater time to write essays. Gilroy and Miles (1996) recognise this:

Many dyslexics students are able to talk about difficult concepts with fluency and yet when they have to express themselves in writing they are unable to 'get across' what they wish to say with anything like the same level of sophistication...[in writing]. (p.97).

In Riddick's et al's, (1997) investigation one student recalled:

Everyone else seems to be able to write an essay in a day, but I sit down and start writing it and the shortest I think I've written one was from about 9.00 until 7.00 and I didn't have a break all day, I just kept going and going. (p.95).

Anecdotal evidence clearly indicates that it takes a great deal of time and effort for a dyslexic student to write an essay, even with support being provided through the support tutor, family, partner and friends to help the student to write improved essays (Riddick, et al 1997). The insistence on even dyslexic students writing essays indicates how academic success in the educational environment is judged almost solely by how effective the individual can be in expressing their ideas on paper.

A further recognition of the difficulties dyslexics face in writing essays is in the structure of *access* programmes, allowing the respondents to re-submit their essays. The significance of this option is that it recognises the different learning needs of all students, therefore, helping dyslexic students to feel more included, through staff providing guidance, and then a second chance to improve essays. The focus on communicating with the written word suggests that success within the educational system is measured by how effective the individual is in demonstrating this skill.

A formal explanation of the respondents' encounters with the academic elements of their programme, is that dyslexic students have a more positive experience of the *access* subjects they have learned through expressing their knowledge via oral (presentations, group work) instead of written (essays) methods of communication. This varied experience confirms that dyslexic students have strengths in verbal communication and weaknesses in written communication with their academic work. Stephens (1996) recognised the verbal strengths of dyslexics and recommended the:

the opportunity of an oral/viva to complement the written submission. (Stephens, 1996, p.49).

Herrington (1996) provides an insight into why oral communication is a more suitable method through highlighting the difficulties this group face:

Dyslexia is a series of cognitive deficits/weaknesses/inefficiencies in processing written language, or a difference in thinking and learning style, which may be an advantage or gift. It usually involves some delay in reading speed and difficulty in producing accurate written work quickly. (p.33).

The main obstacle dyslexic students face is that they learn and express knowledge differently to their peers, which creates problems for them within the educational environment. By recognising the strengths and weaknesses of dyslexics within the educational environment the flexible delivery of *access* helps to make the academic environment more accessible. This connects with suggested learning strategies to help this group, for example staff providing feedback to increase students' understanding and develop their learning skills (Krupska and Klein, 1995).

A cumulative interpretation of the respondent experiences of *access* is that dyslexic students learn differently to their fellow students which influences the level of success they can achieve within the educational environment and their lives as a whole. The implication of learning differently is that dyslexic students may feel excluded within the educational environment. This is because they cannot easily communicate within the recognised format, such as the written word. And with success in society being measured by what qualifications an individual has, it means that education plays an important role in determining life opportunities. If an individual does not fit within the educational environment because they cannot learn in the expected way, it is likely that a dyslexic student will feel marginalised within wider society, whether it is through not having qualifications, or a lack of understanding about this disability.

The picture that emerges is that the structure of *access* allows dyslexic students to have both positive and negative experiences. The positive experience occurs through the flexible structure of *access* recognising the verbal strengths of dyslexics. The negative experience occurs through the respondents encountering

difficulties communicating in a written format, which helps to reinforce a feeling of difference. To increase accessibility and, therefore, improve the dyslexic students' experience, there is a need for a range of measures to assist this group.

At an environmental level possible improvements could be moving away from large group work such as lectures, to small group work, such as seminars, for learning and teaching. This reduces the chances of the classroom being perceived as a threatening environment, encouraging the respondents to participate in discussions. Other developments could be allowing students to communicate their knowledge their preferred format such as through a viva. Further improvements could be through staff development, such as encouraging academics to present subject material in alternative formats. The significance of these suggested improvements at an environmental, and individual, level is that it is increasing the chance of dyslexics achieving academic success whilst enrolled on *access* through making this programme more accessible.

Chapter 12

Learning Support Staff Questionnaire

This chapter presents the findings of the Learning Support staff questionnaire, which provided an insight into the staff perceptions of the support available to dyslexic students enrolled on *access* courses at the Colleges of Further Education.

12:1 Learning Support Questionnaire

The aim of exploring the staff experience was to supplement the investigation of the student experience, which was the main focus of this research.

Table 12:1 provides a breakdown of the staff responses. One student completed a questionnaire on behalf of his *Access* Co-ordinator.

Table 12:1: Breakdown of the staff responses to the Learning Support questionnaire

Access Co-ordinators	2
Learning Support Co-ordinators	5
Student	1

These questionnaires were unique to each Institution because they were based on earlier staff interviews and field notes undertaken during stages 1 and 2 of the research. They were sent to key staff such as Disability, *Access*, Learning Support Co-ordinators and Tutors, with the aim of building up the most accurate and reliable picture possible of the provision available to this student group. As is shown in table 12:1, it was mainly the Learning Support Co-ordinator and Tutor who returned the questionnaire. The reasons given by the *Access* and Disability Co-ordinators for their limited responses was that they felt that these individuals had more of a detailed knowledge of the provision available at their College to these students. This view was reinforced by one *Access* Co-ordinator who returned the questionnaire.

Please note that [Dyslexia Co-ordinator] and [Disability Co-ordinator] are the tutors responsible for dyslexia 'support' in College and are more likely to be able to provide more detailed information about our provision than I can, but I hope this is useful nevertheless. (Access Co-ordinator at College D)

This response suggests that these members of staff had either a formal or informal knowledge of the support available to these students, through either prior teaching experience or awareness of a Support Service. The most significant characteristic to emerge was that each Institution had developed its own distinctive provision towards supporting dyslexic students.

12:2 Learning Support provision at College A

Tom and Jane were the respondents who were enrolled on an *access* programme at College A. It was the Learning Support Tutor only who completed the questionnaire.

This College offered a Support Unit which was available to all students. It seems that they possibly used this service to help them generally with their studies, such as using the computers to type up their essays, or when they required help in specific subjects such as English. It is noticeable that this support varied very much by need and the individual student. The intermittent use of the Support Unit could possibly be explained by the fact that study skills were a formal part of the *access* programme.

Study skills is written in as part of the *access* programme – it is a compulsory feature. (Learning Support Tutor)

It is more likely that these individuals used this area as a quiet place to study than anything else. This could possibly be explained by the fact that they could not borrow any equipment such as a dictaphone to help them with their studies.

Alternatively, these individuals did not need to regularly use the Support Unit because they relied on a Support Tutor for help.

At College A, the respondents had access to one member of staff who had experience of supporting dyslexic students. This member of staff provided a range of help such as:

- ❑ Screening “in-house” for dyslexia.
- ❑ Arranging a formal assessment by an Educational Psychologist.
- ❑ Helping them to become aware of how their dyslexia affects them.
- ❑ Helping them to decide the support packages available to them.
- ❑ Planning strategies, such as mind mapping.
- ❑ Workshop support.
- ❑ Arranging extra time for examinations.
- ❑ Essay support.

The common characteristics that emerged were that the respondents were screened “in-house” and then referred to an Educational Psychologist. It seems more by luck that the individual student was able to access this support, because there is no formalised procedure for referring dyslexic students by academic to support staff, as recalled by the Learning Support Tutor.

Strictly speaking, no. One was picked up at interview, another had prior knowledge of services available from GCSE year. (Learning Support Tutor)

There was more emphasis on the individual declaring any difficulties at the interview stage, which may lead to them being directed to the College Support Services.

12:3 Learning Support provision at College B

James and Jenny were the respondents who were enrolled on an *access* programme at College B. The Learning Support Tutor and the *Access* Co-ordinator completed the questionnaire. This College offered a Support Unit that was available to all students. It was through this Unit that the respondents were able to arrange and access their support packages.

Liaison and negotiation occurs between Student Services and Study Support. The Student Services team has the overview of support for students with dyslexia. (Learning Support & Access Co-ordinator)

It was through Student Services that one respondent, James, was able to borrow equipment, such as a computer, to help him with his studies.

One has – although this didn't occur until the 2nd year of his course. (Learning Support & Access Co-ordinator)

At this College the students mainly relied on one specific member of staff to support them with their studies. This member of staff provided a range of help such as:

- Individual support.
- Helping them to decide the support packages available to them.
- Basic English skills:
 - i.) Essay planning.
 - ii.) Essay construction.
 - iii.) Essay writing.
- Time management skills.
- "In-house" screening for dyslexia.
- Arranging assessment by an Educational Psychologist.

- Arranging extra time for examinations.

It must be noted that the respondents did not access all of these Services at the same time. For example, James did not use the Support Services much during his second year, because there was more of an emphasis on examinations. In addition to this help, the students were able to prepare their work for submission through services such as the Skills Workshop. This involved another student typing up the individual's essay. It was only James who really used this service. It seems these students became aware of the Support Services available to them at this College through a variety of routes:

- Seeking help with their studies.
- Self-identified themselves as dyslexic.
- Attended an initial interview to discuss their support needs.
- At the interview stage became aware of the support services.

The reason why these various routes are highlighted is because one of the respondents, James, was aware of his dyslexia before he started *access*. This is in contrast to Jenny, who did not discover her dyslexia until her second year.

12:4 Learning Support provision at College C

Daniel was the respondent enrolled on an *access* programme at College C. The questionnaire was completed by him on behalf of his *Access* Co-ordinator; and the Dyslexia Support Tutor also completed this questionnaire. The reason provided by this *Access* Co-ordinator was that she did not have the time.

This College offered a Support Unit that was available to disabled students enrolled on its various courses. It was through this Support Unit that Daniel was able to arrange his support package, and students were also able to borrow equipment such as computers.

Loaned for seven months, but not for IT education. (Dyslexic student on behalf of Access Co-ordinator)

This view is reinforced by the Dyslexia Co-ordinator.

As and when requested. (Dyslexia Co-ordinator)

It seems the support to help the students to become familiar with their computer is part of the course, and not a service offered by the Support Unit:

But only as part of the course's criteria. Rather than prior supply by issue of the laptop. (Dyslexic student on behalf of Access Co-ordinator)

This is a welcome option, but the concern here is that the respondents would be under considerable pressure whilst they are learning how to use this equipment. If anything, they may not be able to cope with learning how to develop Information Technology skills and keep up with their course, which could obviously have a detrimental effect on their educational performance. There is also the option for dyslexic students to borrow other equipment such as a dictaphone, from this Support Unit. It is noticeable that this respondent decided not to take up this option, which is explored within the Support chapter. At this College this respondent mainly relied on one specific member of staff to support him with his studies. This member of staff provided a range of help such as:

- ❑ One to one support.
- ❑ Extra time for examinations.
- ❑ Availability of computers to assist with examinations.
- ❑ Proof reading of essays.
- ❑ Spelling.
- ❑ Structuring of essays.
- ❑ Helping to decide the support packages available.

- “In-house” screening for dyslexia.
- Arranging formal assessment by an Educational Psychologist.

When investigating these services further they seemed to be more specific to this Institution. One such opportunity was for students to be provided formal feedback on the support that they have received.

Termly reviews of work, plus a final review are completed where students have the opportunity to provide feedback and it gives me an opportunity to note progression. (Dyslexia Co-ordinator)

A picture of more informal arrangements is provided by Daniel.

Other than conversing with support teacher on immediate needs. (Dyslexic student on behalf of Access Co-ordinator)

The value of providing feedback on the support an individual dyslexic is receiving is that any support is more likely to be tailored to their educational needs. The difference in opinions could be explained by the respondent not interpreting his conversations with his Support Tutor as an assessment of his support package. One noticeable difference here is that this respondent did not have access to the one-to-one support available to the other participants, instead it was group support that was available to Daniel.

12:5 Learning Support provision available at College D

Norman was the respondent enrolled on an *access* programme at College D. It was his Access Co-ordinator and Support Tutor who replied to the questionnaire. This College offered a Support Unit that was available to disabled students enrolled on its various courses. It seems that the unit was more of a place where they received support and help with their studies through a Support Tutor. This contrasted to Colleges B and D, which offered similar services, but were also able to loan out equipment to support the participants with their studies. Norman, had access to

the facilities available to all the other students enrolled on courses at this College. Again the respondent was mostly dependent on one individual to provide support. This member of staff provided a range of help such as:

- Arranging a support package before starting *access*.
- Extra time for examinations.
- "In-house" screening for dyslexia.
- Arranging formal assessment by an Educational Psychologist.
- One-to-one support each week, which covers:
 - i.) Planning assignments.
 - ii.) Editing.
 - iii.) Proof reading of essays.
 - iv.) A structured spelling programme.
 - v.) A structured grammar programme.

It is important to establish how this respondent became aware of the Support Services available at this College. Norman probably became aware through two routes, which were his mother informing him about her positive experience of the support she received whilst attending the College. He was already aware of his dyslexia, therefore, able to declare it on his application forms. All students attending this college are given a guidance interview, which could have resulted in him being referred to the Support Services whether or not he was aware of his dyslexia.

All students receive a guidance interview and are referred appropriately. (Access Co-ordinator)

The opportunity to assess need before the individual starts their studies is ideal, because it is an opportunity to highlight any potential barriers. It would seem these issues could potentially be dealt with at a course interview, which would have the

advantage of raising awareness and increasing the knowledge of the learning needs of disabled students.

12:6 Learning Support provision available at College E

Jennet and Simon were the two respondents enrolled on two different *access* programmes at College E. It was noticeable that these students did not have access to a similar Support Unit that was available to the other participants. Instead they only had access to one Support Tutor, who also acted as the Dyslexia Co-ordinator for the whole of the College. This member of staff provided a range of help such as:

- One to one support.
- Study skills support.
- Arranging Extra time for examinations.
- Help in writing up essays.

When exploring the responses to the one-to-one support, it seems this help was vital, as it allowed the respondents to keep up to date with their studies.

Those who have attended the Support provision have kept within a week of their deadlines. (Dyslexia Co-ordinator)

Without this help it seems likely that the respondents could have dropped out, because they may not have coped with the requirements of *access*. This view is again supported by the *Access* Co-ordinator.

The students who have used the one-to-one support have mostly survived, but those who were referred after Easter have also failed. (Dyslexia Co-ordinator)

Being provided with additional help seems to influence whether or not some individuals have a successful experience of education. It seems these respondents

became aware of the Support Services available to them at this College through a variety of routes.

- Referral by staff.
- Prospective students contacting the Dyslexia Co-ordinator.

Whilst these were the two routes highlighted by the questionnaire, the researcher was aware of Jenet and Simon declaring their dyslexia on their application forms and at interview. The one important factor to note here is that if the individual was not aware of their dyslexia, there is a heavy reliance on teaching staff picking this up, which can be unreliable.

12:7 Discussion

The overriding characteristic to emerge was both variation and similarity between the Colleges in the support available to dyslexic students. The variation was shown through not all Colleges having similar Support Services in place to help this group of students. The variation is not surprising, because of the way in which disabled students are supported within this sector. It could possibly be explained by the legal requirements placed on the Further Educational Funding Council (FEFC) and its funding methodology. Section 4 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, states the duty to:

have regard to the requirements of persons having learning difficulties. (FEFC, 1999, p. 3).

Each of these Colleges would possibly argue that they have fulfilled this requirement by meeting and responding to the varying needs of the local communities. It was recognised by the Tomlinson Report (1996) that:

...there is a need to explain the system more clearly so that colleges may realise its potential value. (FEFC, 1996, p. 10).

Different interpretations of the additional funding mechanism by Colleges could also explain the variation of provision available to these respondents. Some Colleges argue that their interpretation of this funding mechanism is simply meeting the requirements of this provision. Variations may reflect the continual changes in the student population for each respective College, in that any of these institutions may have more or fewer disabled students from one year to the next. It would seem that this funding approach is better suited to individuals who are already aware of and have declared their disability, as the College will have more time to prepare appropriate help. It is therefore likely that a student who is not aware of their dyslexia may not have the same opportunities available to them. The concern here is that the way in which support within Further Education is funded can act as a tool that limits the number of dyslexic students within this sector, therefore reducing the opportunity to achieve academic success and improve their career opportunities for this group.

When further exploring the support provision available there also seemed to be areas of similarity between the Institutions. Examples of similarity are the respondents having access to one-to-one support and being screened *in-house* before a formal assessment by an Educational Psychologist. Individual support seems to be an important part of the support package to help respondents to overcome the barriers they face within the educational environment. These individual sessions helped to develop the respondents' confidence in their own academic abilities by explaining in greater detail their work, or developing an essay plan on the work that these individuals have been taught within their *access* subjects. In essence these respondents are possibly looking to the one Support Tutor to provide them with the reassurance that they are progressing in the right direction. One noticeable characteristic is that there is only one Dyslexia Support Tutor available at each College, even though the Institutions varied in size. Taking

into consideration that each College varied in size, it is necessary to question how effective the support provided by a Tutor would be for a dyslexic student. Tom highlighted this concern with his experience of support at College A, where he felt the Tutor was very busy.

[Support Tutor] also specialises in helping other disabled students at the College, which results in her being very busy at times. I think to myself that she should be helping them not me. (Tom)

The pressure of support staff having to meet the needs of all students results in them possibly not being able to help this group. Other common elements seemed to be the respondents being assessed whilst at College, either in-house or by an Educational Psychologist. This is an important step because these forms of assessment aim to provide students with an explanation for their difficulties and, as a consequence, highlights their strengths and weaknesses, therefore providing them with a platform to move forward. To assist with this process it is vital to carry out an assessment at the earliest stage possible.

After establishing what support is available to these students it seems there are a range of measures, which could be put into place that would help the individual to have a much-improved experience. A possible model of support based on the Learning Support interviews and questionnaires could be:

- ❑ Access to a support unit.
- ❑ One to one support such as study skills.
- ❑ Equipment loan such as computers and training on them.
- ❑ Assessment of dyslexia

If any of these measures were to be put into place, it may still be necessary to start support before the course starts. This could improve the chances of the students gaining academically, therefore reducing the chance of the individual playing

“catch-up” with their studies. It is important to remember that whatever Support is available it cannot be prescriptive because the needs of these individuals vary. One Support Tutor commented.

Since the needs of dyslexic students are all different, it is virtually impossible to say ALL students do anything. (Support Tutor at College D)

Where there is evidence of support being in place, which can potentially enable the respondents to have a much-improved experience of the educational environment, the recommendations of Tomlinson (FEFC, 1996) suggests that this platform should be built on by:

...a more generous interpretation ... in the light of changing conditions. (p.10).

By taking into consideration these comments and to help this Sector to become more accessible, it is necessary to have foundations of a basic provision in place, possibly along the lines of the recommendations made by the HEFCE (99/04) baseline provision document (for HEIs), which then individual Colleges can build on to respond to the needs of that local communities of learners.

Chapter 13

Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the contribution this study has made to the access to Higher Education debate, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical framework and methodology used to explore the students' experience.

13:1 Contribution to the access debate

When establishing the contribution this research has made, it is important to remember that this investigation of the dyslexic student experience adopted a critical social research approach, which starts from the premise that society contains elements that oppress certain groups and individuals. As stated by Harvey (1990).

‘Critical social research’...refers,...only to work which involves a critique of oppressive social structure ... [that exists within society]. (p.19).

In adopting this critical view of the world, it is necessary to ask the question – how do these findings reveal the ways in which dyslexic people are marginalised within the educational environment, and wider society?

Turning to Compulsory and Further Education, the key issue to emerge is that the current structure of these educational sectors tends to prevent dyslexic people from achieving the same academic success as their non-dyslexic peers. One difficulty facing dyslexics was the introduction of “market principles” into Compulsory and Further Education. The move towards a market approach to education occurred:

...in the UK, from the Education Reform Act of 1988 onwards,...[it]... has been concerned with releasing market forces at the school, College and Tertiary level. (Lucas and Mace, 1999:116).

The intention behind the 1979-97 Conservative administration introducing market principles into education was to reduce State expenditure and provide greater value for money. This would be achieved through increasing participation, providing greater student (and parental) choice and delegating budgets to individual Institutions. Tom highlighted the reality of increased participation through *access* programmes.

We went to the Open Day which was eye opening in itself, and came for an interview (very informal interview) with the sector manager who made us feel welcome, where I did broach the subject of dyslexia. However, I think in the end these individuals were only interested in whether I could breathe. (Tom)

The problem with market principles is that it introduced a "factory" approach to education. As stated by Eisner (1985):

The school was seen as a plant. The superintendent directed the operation of the plan. The teachers were engaged in a job of engineering, and the pupils were the raw material to be processed in that plant, according to the demands of the consumers. Furthermore, the product was to be judged at regular intervals along the production line using quality control standards which were to be quantified to reduce the likelihood of error. Product specifications were to be prescribed before the raw material was processed. In this way efficiency, measured with respect to cost primarily, could be determined. (p. 42).

The impact of market forces on education (Compulsory and Further) is that students are being treated as products, who are expected to acquire specific skills and knowledge as they progress along an educational conveyor belt. The inflexible educational structure is reflected through the introduction of Performance Indicators, such as league tables, into the educational environment. The focus on Performance Indicators has resulted in a greater emphasis on increasing general

academic standards than on meeting the needs of students with special educational needs (Bagley and Woods, 1998), such as dyslexics. The difficulty that market forces create for dyslexic students is that they have led to the establishment of a set of relatively fixed educational standards that an individual is expected to meet if they want to achieve success whilst at school, College or University, and the wider world. Such criteria are measured by being able to communicate knowledge via a written and verbal format to acquire qualifications. For dyslexics, who often cannot communicate via a written format on the same level as their non-dyslexic peers, this expectation creates a barrier. It is highlighted by the respondents' experiences of school and College before *access*. Simon recalled his negative experience of teachers whilst at school.

I always remember being asked by my Maths teachers to stand on a table in front of the whole class and go through my times table in front of the whole class, as a punishment because I could not get them right. It put me off Maths for the rest of my life and has made me very wary of teachers and lecturers. (Simon)

Norman recalls one negative encounter with a lecturer.

After I was humiliated by the one lecturer over me using a dictaphone, I decided to never use any equipment within any classes as I was always concerned that any lecturer would make me stand out as different if they asked any questions in front of the whole of the class. (Norman)

Focussing on the individual, instead of the wider environment, locates dyslexia within a medical and individual model instead of the social model of disability. The difficulty facing dyslexic students is that they are forced to fit into the educational norm, which results in this group being marginalised, whether it is within education, or the wider world. The significance of negative prior educational experiences is that it establishes the need for educational programmes

such as *access* to provide non-traditional learners, such as dyslexic people, with a second chance to achieve academic success in a more positive atmosphere.

The individualisation of dyslexia is further reflected through attempts to recognise and provide support for this specific disability. The emphasis on the individual is also shown through diagnosis of dyslexia through assessment procedure by an Educational Psychologist.

When I went to see the Educational Psychologist I was really nervous, because I was on my own and I had the feeling that the intention behind the assessment was to find out what was wrong me, whether I was dyslexic or just thick or stupid. (Jenny)

The dyslexia assessment is that it is the equivalent to a medical diagnosis for another form of disability, because it finds out why the individual cannot meet the required educational expectations at the various stages of their lives, such as being able to acquire GCSE's and A Levels. This includes the the assessment searching for medical difficulties such as:

...evidence of any cognitive disabilities or neurological anomalies (e.g. in memory, visual perception, phonological processing or motor co-ordination) which are likely to have adverse effects on learning. (NWPD, 1999,p. 97).

And individual difficulties such as:

...evidence that the difficulties or disabilities that have been identified are not primarily due to (a) limitations in experience of written and/or spoken English, (b) lack of motivation, application or educational opportunity, (c) emotional causes, or (d) poor general health or a medical condition. (NWPD, 1999,p.97).

The emphasis on finding out what is "wrong" with the individual is reflected through the dyslexia assessment providing guidance on how to accommodate the needs of the dyslexic within the educational environment, whether this is through

additional time for examinations, or study skills support to help the student communicate more effectively in a written or verbal format.

The dyslexia assessment also reflects the power of professionals such as the Educational Psychologist, as they are able to determine whether or not an individual is dyslexic and the support that should be provided. These individuals are the educational equivalent of doctors, health care professionals or social workers. The significance of Educational Psychologists' position is that it helps to maintain the hold of these professionals over dyslexic people through their claiming to know more about what is right for dyslexics than the individuals themselves. The dyslexia assessment helps to maintain the status quo, and therefore the oppression this group faces within the educational environment and the wider world. This is because the dyslexia assessment does not recommend that the environment adapts, instead it suggests ways by which to re-integrate the individual dyslexic into the educational environment through a range of strategies, such as providing a computer to help the individual with their studies. The difficulty with Educational Psychologists having the power to determine whether or not a student is dyslexic is that it contributes towards limiting the knowledge of this disability throughout society, therefore contributing towards the oppression this group encounters.

The focus on the individual throughout the dyslexia assessment helps to fit with the market principles that dominated the educational environment during the 1980s and 1990s. The method of assessment is helping to provide value for money, by responding to the needs of the individual student instead of adapting the wider environment to support dyslexics. By responding to individuals, it is possible to keep costs down to a minimum when recognising dyslexia. However, with market principles being introduced into education as an attempt to raise levels of participation, conflict occurs between the attempt to increase numbers and the

support available. The reality here is that if higher levels of participation are encouraged, it is likely that the number of dyslexics entering the educational environment will increase. The consequence of the increase in numbers is that existing methods of assessment will not be able to cope with demand and will prove to be an expensive way to recognise dyslexia. This view is recognised within Colleges developing in-house screening to:

...ascertain whether a full psychological or diagnostic assessment would be warranted (because psychological assessment is quite expensive and time consuming). (NWPD, 1999,p.87).

This was the case with the respondents who undertook in-house assessments at each of the colleges at which they were studying. As highlighted by Tom:

I remember having my internal assessment with [Support Tutor] to establish whether or not it was likely that I was dyslexic. This is because [Support Tutor] told me that the actual assessment was very expensive, therefore to justify the expense to the College they had to firstly find out whether or not I displayed dyslexic characteristics. However, I remember it taking some time to be officially assessed because I was always being told that the College had to find the money. (Tom)

Development of screening shows that individual recognition of dyslexia, is in reality, incompatible with the market principles which dominate the educational environment. The problem with focussing on the individual dyslexic is that the student may not receive the help they need to achieve academic success whilst on *access*. In contrast the increase in participation would suggest the need to tackle the wider environment if education is to become more accessible to this group. Dyslexic people are facing multiple layers of oppression within society whether ,this is through encountering a lack of knowledge or being assessed for this disability.

The focus on the individual student through the dyslexia assessment is further reflected through the support provided to this group within the educational environment. This is because support, whether it is people such as a Support Tutor, or equipment, such as a computer or a dictaphone, aims to provide the student with enough help to re-integrate them into education, so they can compete on an equal academic footing with their peers:

I remember being told by [Disability Co-ordinator] that the intention behind me being provided with a computer is that it would help me to organise and complete my essays, which would hopefully increase the chance of me getting good grades. (James)

The significance of this approach is that it helps to maintain the status quo therefore the oppression dyslexic students face within the educational environment. This is specifically seen through the role of professionals such as a Support Tutor, who are recognised as the official individuals to help this group. The Support Tutor helps to maintain the oppression dyslexic people face at numerous levels. This is specifically seen with the Support Tutor, who has the responsibility for interpreting the recommendations of the dyslexia assessment, whether they are internal or external, to provide this group help with their studies at their respective College:

After the assessment I remember going through the Educational Psychologist's report with [Support Tutor], so he could explain the various tests and what they meant. After that we started to discuss what further support could be offered to meet my needs. (Jenny)

Through the Support Tutor helping to decide the support package a dyslexic student receives, these individuals are helping to maintain the power of professionals within the educational environment. This was highlighted by many of the respondents, such as Tom, identifying the Support Tutor as providing a "safety net." The Support Tutor has the specific responsibility for rehabilitating the dyslexic through providing direct support, or recommending specific equipment

to help this group to communicate more effectively within a written or verbal format. The power of the support tutor is maintained through the dyslexic student becoming dependent on these professionals, as they are perceived as the individuals who can provide students with the assistance they need to achieve academic success. Oliver (1987) highlighted what this dependency on professionals means for disabled people:

I would further criticise the 'professionalisation' of service for disabled people, on the assumption that the professionals know best what disabled people need and are in charge. The provision of services in such a way is at best patronising, and at worst further disabling, since disabled people may be pushed into becoming passive recipients of the kinds of services other people think they ought to have. (p.18).

The extent of dependency is reflected through the fact that if a dyslexic student, such as any of the respondents who took part in this research, decided not to seek help from the Support Tutor at each of their respective Colleges they would have received little, if any, Institutional help.

The involvement of the Support Tutor shows that there are a series of professionals involved in assisting dyslexics within the educational environment starting with the academic (teacher or lecturer), the Educational Psychologist and Support Tutor. It is important to recognise that each of these individuals plays an important role at different stages of the educational experience, whether this is through recognising students' dyslexia or providing support with their studies. In recognising that the educational environment is oppressive, the reality of the current position of dyslexics suggests that they need to make the best of this situation through working with professionals (academics, Educational Psychologists and Support Tutor) if they are to achieve academic success, therefore improved life opportunities.

The availability of the Support Tutor reflects the fact that there is an attempt, through *access*, to meet the needs of non-traditional groups such as dyslexic students within the educational environment. Simon recalled the effect of help:

When I started *access* it was the first time that I received any support to help me with my studies. It was great that I could always go to [Support Tutor] for help with my work or when College was getting me down. (Simon)

In attempting to meet individual need there is a clear attempt to provide cost-effective support to dyslexic students, whether they are at school or College. However, the focus on the individual is helping to maintain the marginalisation dyslexic people face within the educational environment, through reinforcing feelings of difference, between this group and their non-dyslexic peers, as reflected by respondents such as Daniel. Furthermore, the support a dyslexic receives can help to reinforce feelings of difference in this group because each student receives differing support to assist them with their studies. The focus on the individual helps to maintain the control professionals, such as the Support Tutor and the Educational Psychologist, have over this group.

However, the reality of focussing on the individual instead of the wider environment is that instead of minimising, it is actually increasing, costs. This is reflected in the Further Educational Funding Council for Wales (FEFCW, 1998) progressively providing an increase of funds to meet the needs of disabled students, which rose from £400,000 to £2,246,000 between 1993-1998. The increase in funding has occurred because there has been a growth in the number of students requiring additional support, where between 1994-97, there was an increase from 75,000 to 116,100 needing help (FEFC, 99/05). The increase in student numbers results from the market principles introduced into education via the 1979-1997 Conservative administration, which aimed to increase levels of participation. Instead of focussing on the individual as a cost effective method of

support, it is again becoming “too costly” to meet the support needs of dyslexic students. Students find they cannot access the support which should be available because it is too costly for Institutions to provide help, which reduces the chance of this group achieving academic success. The Learning Support Tutor at College E highlighted this concern because she felt it was not possible to meet the needs of the respondents fully because of the lack of Institutional resources. The way in which the educational environment is currently structured places barriers in the way of dyslexic people who want to achieve academic success, whether this is through having to be assessed, or receiving specific support for this disability.

When dyslexic people move out of the educational environment into the wider world they still face oppression. Respondents such as Tom, Daniel and James highlighted this concern, being cautious about disclosing their disability widely to others, such as friends and work colleagues. One explanation is that success in society is often measured by what qualifications an individual has gained, whether it is at school, College or University. This is highlighted by the respondents such as Tom, Jenny and Jane, who felt that *access*, would allow them to obtain a professional career. Bolton (1986) has a similar view:

[this is] ... a society where the possession of a degree is, in most cases, a passport to a wide range of careers. (p.6).

The problem facing dyslexic people is that, because of the failure of the educational environment to take into consideration the needs of this group, they may be perceived as a failure within the wider world, since qualifications are used as a measure to determine the success of the individual within society. Education connects with the wider world because it is an environment which is instilling a set of common skills which the individual is expected to have if they are to survive in the wider world, such as the ability to communicate in a written and verbal format. The failure of dyslexics to acquire these specific skills at a sufficient level results in

this group being perceived as different to their non-dyslexic peers within the educational environment and the wider world. The role of education within society is reflected in the power of qualifications within the wider world. It is the emphasis on continual learning that makes qualifications a powerful tool, as they are being used to help structure society. Qualifications help to create a hierarchy of careers such as professional careers (e.g. teachers, lecturers, doctors and solicitors), at the top of the ladder, whereas no qualifications places an individual (e.g. unskilled manual workers) at the bottom of a career ladder. The effect of qualifications is that they help to rationalise the number of people doing certain jobs within society. The implication for dyslexics is that they are excluded from doing certain jobs because of their lack of qualifications, which often results in individuals being at the bottom of the career ladder. *Access* attempts to address this issue through providing individuals, whether or not they are dyslexic, with a second opportunity to gain a qualification, which would lead to improved career opportunities.

The representation of disability within today's society, whether it is through the media or the disability movement, can contribute towards the limited knowledge of dyslexia. Turning to the media, the problem facing dyslexic people is that there is little representation of this disability through newspapers, television and books. Riddick (1995) found that eighteen mothers, out of twenty-five, had heard some reference to dyslexia through magazines, papers, books, television and the radio. Instead disability within the mainstream media, are represented mainly as the visible candidates, with disabled people being represented as:

...the tragic but brave invalid (for example, Tiny Tim); the sinister cripple (for example, Dr No); the 'supercrip', who has triumphed over tragedy (for example, (Helen Keller). (Shakespeare, 1999,p.164).

The problem with the media representing disability as having a visible and physical form is that it contributes to the general public's attitudes to and images of disabled people. There is wide recognition of the media having the potential to shape the public perception of disability both through the work of academics (Inglis, 1991; Ang, 1996; Eldridge et al, 1997) and the Broadcasting Standards Council (1994), which acknowledged that cultural imagery plays an important role in attitude and identity formation.

The difficulty facing dyslexic people occurs at two levels: Firstly, with limited media recognition of dyslexia, and failure to locate it within the notion of disability, it is unlikely to be recognised as a disability within society. Therefore discovery of dyslexia is less likely to occur, whether it is within or outside the educational environment. Secondly, if dyslexia is identified, it is likely that the dyslexic person will still face oppression within society. This can be through people with dyslexia being treated as "tragic individuals" or the belief that "dyslexia does not exist," therefore is an "excuse." As there is limited reference to this disability within the mainstream media, this could explain parental, family and partner reaction to this disability. Instead of searching for a reason, such as dyslexia, to "explain" an individual's difficulty, it is likely that traditional explanations such as "not academically capable" would be adopted. The difficulty with the media influencing public attitudes is that they have the power to establish what are "recognised" and "acceptable" disabilities within society. The problem with limited recognition of dyslexia within the media is that dyslexics will feel different, as well as isolated and marginalised, within society, because their needs are not recognised.

One impact of the lack of reference to dyslexia within the media and wider society is that College *access* programmes will be enrolling students who are unaware of this disability. The significance of *access* attracting individuals who want to better

their lives, but are unaware of dyslexia, is that a responsibility is being placed on those professionals working within this programme to recognise this disability, whether this is through lecturers, or study skills, if it is actually perceived as a second chance to achieve academic success. The failure to recognise dyslexia whilst on *access* results in this group being less likely to achieve academic success, therefore potentially questioning the value of returning to education to improve their lives.

Turning to the disability movement itself, the limited recognition it has of dyslexia could help to explain why there is little knowledge of this disability within wider society. The value of the disability movement for disabled people is that it has helped to challenge the oppression this group faces, partly through providing theoretical tools, such as the Social Model of Disability, to explain their position within society and to strive:

...for full economic, social and political inclusion in society.
(Chappell, 1998, p.211).

In recognising the value of the Social Model of Disability for the disability movement, it is necessary to consider whether people with dyslexia would be able to identify with this specific interpretation? To an extent the disability movement has gone some way to recognising dyslexia through the acceptance of the label specific learning difficulties. Irrespective of this label, it is important to highlight that the prospective students willing to take part in this research, and the respondents felt that they were not "disabled." The closest these individuals came to linking to the label "disabled" was through the researcher making them aware that they would be entitled to additional grants such as the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), when they progressed onto University.

At a general level, the closest the disability movement has come to recognising dyslexia is through the label specific learning difficulties. However, as indicated by the respondents' reaction to being classed as "disabled" they also displayed little identification with the label learning difficulties, instead they were happier with the label "dyslexia" as an explanation for their difficulties. One explanation for the barriers facing dyslexic people is that much of the literature emerging from the disability movement defines:

...impairment in terms of the body. (Chappell, 1998,p.214).

The focus on the body is reflected through the work of Hevey (1993), who argued that:

...the history of the portrayal of disabled people is that disabled people are portrayed as flawed able-bodied people. (p.118).

The problem of focussing on the body is that dyslexic people are excluded from the disability movement because their impairment is not linked with the body. The problem for dyslexic people fitting into the disability movement is further reflected through attempts to define impairment. The attempt to define impairment has solely focussed on the body, such as the social model of impairment (Crow, 1996) being used to explain bodily pain. An explanation for dyslexia not being recognised within the disability movement, is that its most prominent current disabled writers, such as Mike Oliver and Sally French, are writing from their own personal experience of a physical or sensory impairment.

With the popular media portraying disabled people as physically different through films such as 'Tommy' (1975), it is understandable that the disability movement has focussed on the body to challenge the oppression they encounter. Nonetheless, the problem with this is that dyslexic people will feel marginalised from the disability movement because their needs are not taken into consideration. One

consequence of people with dyslexia feeling excluded from the disability movement is that they will be less able to fight for the social, political and economic rights, for which other disabled people are fighting for and will miss out on the social support provided by the movement. However, the lack of knowledge of dyslexia could also be explained by organisations such as the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) and the Adult Dyslexia Association (ADO) failing to make any reference to disability. This view is reflected through the British Dyslexia Association (BDA, 2000) definition of dyslexia.

'Dyslexia' comes from a Greek word and it means 'difficulty with words.' Dyslexia affects reading, spelling, writing, memory and concentration, and sometimes maths, music, foreign languages and self-organisation. Some people call dyslexia 'a specific learning difficulty.' Dyslexia tends to run in families. Dyslexia continues throughout life. 10% of the population is dyslexic, 4% being severely dyslexic. Dyslexic people may have creative, artistic, practical skills. They can develop strategies for their areas of difficulty. (p.1).

The picture that emerges is that dyslexic people may not class themselves as disabled at two levels. This is firstly through the disability movement failing to recognise the needs of dyslexics by focussing on the body. Secondly, with dyslexia organisations failing to link definitions of dyslexia to a wider interpretation of disability offered by the social model of disability. A similar picture is displayed by the U.S. Deaf scholar Tom Humphries:

There is no room within the culture of Deaf people for an ideology that all Deaf people are deficient. It simple does not compute. There is no 'handicap' to overcome. (Humphries, 1993, p.14).

The picture that emerges is that certain groups of disabled people will feel more included (or excluded) within the disability movement than others. The consequence of people with dyslexia not being on an equal footing to other disabled people is that this group will face two barriers, which are the failure of

wider society and of the disability movement to take their needs into consideration. The risk in dyslexic people not viewing themselves as disabled, or the disability movement not fully taking into consideration the needs of this group, is that it can result in dividing disabled people, therefore contributing towards the hold of professionals over this group. For *Access* programmes the failure of the disability movement to take into consideration the needs of dyslexics contributes towards the marginalisation this group faces whilst enrolled on this programme. The disability movement failing to use its political power to educate *access* providers on how to develop programmes that take into consideration the needs of people with dyslexia and other disabilities. This may contribute towards this group achieving limited or no academic success through programmes such as *access*.

13:2 Evaluation of the theoretical framework and methodology

For an evaluation of theoretical framework and methodology, it is necessary to establish the strengths and weaknesses of the Critical Social Research and the Grounded Theory method used for this study. It is therefore necessary to ask the question: has the Critical Social Research approach and Grounded Theory method allowed me to effectively explore dyslexics' student experience of *access*?

To achieve this goal, it is important to consider whether a mixed research approach can be used to undertake social research. The realist approach, offered by Layder (1993) as a way to conduct social research, suggests that it is possible to use this to investigate dyslexic students' experience of *access*. This research approach draws on:

...the ideas of Merton and Glaser and Strauss with a view to developing an alternative approach which builds on the stronger features of each of these ... (Middle Range Theory and Grounded Theory) ... and excludes their less useful ones. (Layder, 1993,p.4).

Through the realist approach, drawing on Middle Range Theory and Grounded Theory it intends to:

...convey the 'textured' or interwoven nature of different levels and dimensions of social reality. (Layder, 1993,p.7).

The realist approach aims to reveal the complex nature of the social site under investigation, by offering an insight into society that looks at macro issues such as structural and institutional phenomena as well as micro phenomena such as interaction and behaviour.

The disability research strategy advocated by Stone and Priestly (1996) will now be used as a guide to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical framework and methodology in this study. They state disability research should be based around:

- 1.The adoption of a social model of disablement as the epistemological basis for research production;
- 2.The surrender of claims to objectivity through overt political commitment to the struggles of disabled people for self-emancipation;
- 3.The willingness to only undertake research where it will be of practical benefit to the self-empowerment of disabled people and/or the removal of disabling barriers;
- 4.The evolution of control over research production to ensure full accountability to disabled people and their organisations;
- 5.Giving voice to the personal as political, whilst endeavouring to collectivise the political commonality of individual experiences;
- 6.The willingness to adopt a plurality of methods for data collection and analysis in response to the changing needs of disabled people. (p.706).

This research adopted the social model of disability to explain the respondents' experiences of *access*. This model was chosen because of its power to transform the consciousness of disabled people as recalled by David Hevey (1992).

The second flash on this road to Damascus as a disabled person came when I encountered the disability movement. I had learnt to live with my private fear and to feel that I was the only one involved in this fight. I had internalised my oppression. I think I went through an almost evangelical conversion as I realised that my disability was not, in fact, the epilepsy, but the toxic drugs with their denied side-effects; the medical regime with its blaming of the victim; the judgement through distance and silence of bus-stops crowds, bar-room crowds and dinner-table friends; the fear; and, not least, the employment problems. All this was the oppression, not the epileptic seizure at which I was hardly (consciously) present. (p.1-2).

By adopting the social model of disability, the research was able to highlight the barriers dyslexic people faced within and outside the educational environment, such as through limited knowledge of dyslexia being displayed by academics (teachers and lecturers) and the respondents' families (grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters). To contextualise the respondents' experiences within the wider social world, a Critical Social Research approach was used to understand the encounters of dyslexic people on *access* programme.

Instead of trying to be "objective" the research was more committed towards empowering the students with dyslexia who took part in the research. The move towards committed research is a direct reaction against the negative experiences disabled people encountered (Hunt, 1981) as research subjects. The study could not have reflected an objective approach, because the researcher himself is dyslexic, and therefore had an understanding of the barriers this group faces whilst at school and College. It is the personal experience of the researcher and his commitment to improving the position of dyslexic people within the educational environment, through challenging the oppression this group faces, which was the motivating factor behind the study.

It is also important to consider whether this research would be of any practical benefit to the dyslexic students enrolled on *access*. This is because previous disability research has been criticised for failing to effect:

...immediate improvements in the material conditions of life for the disabled research subjects. (Oliver, 1992:109).

The practical benefits of the research for the respondents were that it allowed the individuals to share their experiences of this disability with fellow dyslexics and the researcher, therefore helping them to gain a greater understanding of dyslexia and fostering supportive relationships. Through the respondents sharing their experiences with the researcher it was also possible to identify the barriers they face and to explore ways of overcoming them, to increase the chance of the student achieving academic success whilst enrolled on *access*. The dyslexic respondents were also made aware of the support available to them if they progressed onto Higher Education, through the researcher making the respondents aware of the support and grants available.

At a more general level the practical benefit of the research for dyslexic people is that it has helped to raise and increase professionals' knowledge of this group. This has occurred through the dissemination of the research findings through a range of fora such as academic journals, conferences, disability organisations, disability mailbases and government bodies. By highlighting the position of dyslexic people and the barriers they face through this study, it is hoped that schools and Colleges will become more accessible to this group.

When exploring the *access* environment, the dyslexic students had control, as far as possible, over the research process. This was through the researcher meeting with those respondents who were willing to take part in the study beforehand to explain the research and answer any questions these individuals had. If these

individuals wanted to take part in the study, but felt changes would need to be made, the researcher would do so. When the research was being carried out the dyslexic respondents participated in the research process. This was through respondents being initially asked two questions, which were:

1. Tell me what are the important things for you being on *access*?
2. Tell me what are the important things for you being dyslexic?

Through drawing on the data generated from these conversations and the findings generated from the first stage of the research dyslexic people were guiding the study, by helping to develop the questions to be asked through various subsequent interviews. To embed the control the dyslexic students had over the research process, these individuals were shown the interview schedule before each interview to establish whether or not it permitted a valid representation of their experiences of each area such as the respondent's experiences of dyslexia whilst on *access*. If changes resulting from participants' comments had to be made to the interview schedule they would be carried out before starting the interview. Whilst undertaking the analysis of the study, the researcher has maintained contact with the respondents to share with them the Substantive, Formal and Cumulative Theories, in order to establish whether they represent the respondents' experiences

Through exploring the respondents' experiences, the research has helped to collectivise and politicise their encounters on *access*. Stone and Priestly (1996) suggest this is where a divide occurs among disability theorists, who may want to focus on the individual (Morris, 1992) or the collective (Abberley, 1992) experience. The approach adopted for this study was to collectivise the respondents' experiences of *access*. This has occurred through the researcher drawing the respondent's experiences together during the writing up period. The significance of this approach is that it helps to highlight the barriers dyslexic

people collectively face within the educational environment, whether this is having to be assessed or teaching styles being too fast. It was noticeable that some of the respondents even expressed surprise about the commonality of their own experiences whilst on *access*. The value of looking at the respondents' experiences as a whole is that this moves away from the individualising approach to dyslexia. It moves towards a more holistic picture by establishing the barriers this group faces whilst at school and College.

Considering the adoption of a range of methods of data collection to explore the selected social site, there is a debate over whether either qualitative or quantitative or a combination of both methods should be used (Stone and Priestly, 1996). This research used semi-structured interviewing techniques and questionnaires to explore the students' and Learning Support staff experience of *access*.

Current researchers within the field of disability research, such as Abberley (1992) and Barnes (1992), suggest the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection within an emancipatory approach. Why did this study adopt semi-structured interviewing and questionnaires? It is important to remember that whatever methods are adopted they can be used within an oppressive context (Stone and Priestly, 1996). To meet this concern the semi-structured interview then questionnaires were used in order to:

...to give primacy to the personal experience of disablement. (Stone and Priestly, 1996,p.706)..

This permitted the dyslexic respondents and Learning Support staff an opportunity to tell their own personal experiences of *access*. This helped this study to meet one of the key requirements of disability research by casting these individuals as the experts on their own situation.

By comparing the theoretical framework and methodology against the Stone and Priestly (1996) checklist, one of the strengths of the study was that it followed their principles for conducting disability research. Adopting the social model of disability to explain the respondent's experiences of *access* moved the study from an objective towards a committed approach towards conducting research. The significance of this investigation of the *access* environment following the recommended way to conduct research is that therefore this study would be recognised by the disability movement as a valid insight into the educational experiences of people with dyslexia.

However, in recognising the strengths of the theoretical framework and methodology used to explore experiences of *access*, it is also necessary to consider possible weaknesses. One weakness was that the respondents were not fully involved in deciding the methods of data collection, such as the choice of the semi-structured method of interviewing. This method of interviewing was used during the first stage of the research, therefore, to maintain continuity in exploring the dyslexic student experience the semi-structured method of interviewing was used again. The researcher recognised this difficulty by building checks into the research, through asking the respondents before each interview whether the interview schedule reflected their experience of the specific areas under consideration. After each interview, he also asked them whether or not they wished to say anything more, as well as encouraging them to contact him after the interview had finished. Before each new interview, the respondents were also asked whether they wished to say anything more about the previous area.

Another possible weaknesses of this study was that the academic community might not view it as a scientific piece of research. This is because the critical social research approach, used to locate the investigation of *access* rejects:

...the positivist view of social research as the pursuit of absolute knowledge through the scientific method. (Oliver 1992,p.110).

However, with the research using Grounded Theory to analyse the respondents' experiences it suggests that this research can be interpreted as a scientific study because of the commitment of this research method to use:

...a systematic ... [and rigorous] ... set of procedures to develop an inductively derived Grounded Theory about a phenomenon. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.24).

The emphasis on Grounded Theory aiming to generate an explanation that is based on the data, helps to confront the:

...social oppression at whatever levels it occurs. (Oliver 1992:110).

For these students with dyslexia within the educational environment at a macro and micro level. The adoption of Grounded Theory as a method to investigate the respondents' experiences has helped to strengthen the theoretical framework and methodology used to explore experiences of *access* programmes.

Critical Social Research and Grounded Theory method have worked together effectively to explore the dyslexic students' experience of *access*. The value of using this research approach is that it has helped to reveal the complex nature of the educational environment, by highlighting the micro and macro barriers these people faced whilst at school and College. Hence, this study has met the twin goals facing the disability movement in that:

...is a need to satisfy the rigorous demands of academe at the same time as furthering the political campaign for emancipation and equality. (Stone and Priestly, 1996,p.715).

The significance of meeting these goals is that this investigation of the dyslexic student experience can be said to have made an important contribution to the

existing body of knowledge about non-traditional groups and challenges the oppression they face within society.

Chapter 14

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter is to draw together the investigation of the dyslexic students' experience of *access* and then to make recommendations concerning the future planning of such programmes as well as related issues.

14:1 Conclusions

What does this study add to the field of disability and education? At a general level this research is telling us that there is variability in the knowledge of dyslexia of professionals within Compulsory and Further Education.

The respondents' experiences of the Compulsory educational sector suggest that there is little knowledge of dyslexia. Teachers and the respondents' parents displayed little or no understanding of this disability, instead being more prepared to treat these individuals as "not academically capable." The lack of knowledge about dyslexia could possibly be attributed to a range of reasons, such as the hidden nature of this disability; or the introduction of market principles into education, which are making it too costly for schools to recognise and provide support to this group. The difficulty with the lack of recognition of dyslexia whilst at school is that the respondents "learn" that they are "not intelligent" and therefore acquire an inaccurate belief that they are not capable of achieving academic success. The problem with negative encounters whilst at school is that students, whether aware of their dyslexia, will potentially not want to return to education later because of the fear that similar negative encounters would be repeated.

Despite the respondents' negative experiences whilst at school, these individuals decided to return to education through programmes such as *access* or A Levels. Their decision to return to education was because these individuals recognised the need for qualifications if they were to improve the life opportunities available to them. Through attending programmes such as *access*, these individuals found a greater knowledge of dyslexia among Further Education professionals.

Lecturers and Learning Support staff were more likely to recognise this disability and provide appropriate support than staff in Compulsory Education had been. The value of the respondents coming into contact with staff who have knowledge of dyslexia, is that they have an explanation, other than personal inadequacy, possibly for the first time, for the academic difficulties they encountered previously. The significance of the recognition of dyslexia is that it is provided this group with a second chance to achieve academic success through their return to education.

Access programmes are structured to meet the needs of non-traditional students. The structure helped the respondents to get used to studying again, such as through providing flexible hand in-dates; assessments after each module; and the option to re-submit essays. The value of this flexible structure is that it helped the respondents to realise that their return to education through *access* will not be a repeat of previous negative educational experiences. Instead *access* aimed to provide individuals with positive experiences, to achieve academic success with their lives, therefore improve their life opportunities.

One form of positive experience was apparent in the way in which *access* was delivered to the respondents in the classroom. These individuals enjoyed studying within this environment, they could gain new ideas on subjects, receive individual help from their lecturers, and provide presentations as well as written

assignments. These experiences increase the chances of the respondents achieving academic success, which can contribute towards these individuals feeling included within the educational environment.

The respondents' positive relationships encountered with their fellow students further contributed towards this group having a positive experience of *access*. Positive encounters occurred with both non-disabled and dyslexic students. Both groups provided help to each other, whether this was through collecting notes or providing specific support. The respondents had positive experiences when they came into contact with fellow dyslexic students, as they had a shared understanding of this disability and could provide support. Respondents encountering good relations with fellow *access* students, whether or not they are dyslexic, helped them to feel included within the educational environment.

In recognising there was some knowledge of dyslexia at each of the participating Colleges, the research also revealed that the respondents still faced difficulties. One problem area was the respondents facing difficulties in surviving financially whilst enrolled on *access*, which was reflected through these individuals relying on their family for financial support or working to help them survive *access*. The impact of struggling financially whilst on *access* is that it does not encourage adults, whether or not they are dyslexic, to return to education to improve their life opportunities through the acquisition of qualifications.

When the respondents discovered their dyslexia it was noticeable that they encountered difficulties at an Institutional and individual level. At an Institutional level the respondents encountered Institutions finding difficulties in obtaining the funding to pay for an assessment by an Educational Psychologist. The problem with the high cost of the assessment is that the individual is potentially being prevented from discovering whether or not they are dyslexic, therefore accessing

the available support to help them with their studies. To an extent colleges have attempted to tackle the high cost of the dyslexia assessment through providing an internal screening. However, with the emphasis on the report by an Educational Psychologist being a key for accessing funding, there is a need to provide additional funding or to change the means by which recognition of this disability is confirmed, if individuals are to establish whether or not they are dyslexic.

At an individual level, the respondents encountered difficulties in "coming to terms with their dyslexia." This was reflected through these individuals displaying a range of emotions, such as feeling embarrassed and being shocked, once they discovered their dyslexia. The respondents welcomed the discovery of dyslexia as providing an explanation for the difficulties they encountered earlier within their lives. However their mixed reaction reflected uncertainty about how they will now be perceived by their families, their fellow students and their friends.

Review of the support provision available to the respondents revealed that there was a variation in help within and between each College. The disparity within Institutions is reflected through a certain respondent being provided with a computer to assist him with his studies, whereas another individual enrolled on the same *access* programme was not provided with such equipment.

Variation also occurred between each Institution. Some Institutions had Support Units in place to meet the learning needs of students such as dyslexics, whereas others did not; some Institutions were prepared to provide computers to help the respondents with their studies. The variation in support between Institutions suggested that a student who is already aware of their dyslexia is probably in a better position to receive support, because they (potentially) have more knowledge of what help is required. This allowed them to ask the right questions, unlike individuals who become aware of dyslexia once they started *access*.

Even though it was more likely that dyslexia would be recognised by staff within Further Education, the research still discovered some lecturers displaying little understanding of this disability. The lack of understanding was reflected through the respondents being made to feel unwanted within the classroom, as well as these individuals being embarrassed by staff over the use of their support equipment such as a dictaphone. Such experiences contribute towards the feeling of marginalisation within the educational environment.

Difficulties in understanding the subject material taught contributed towards the difficulties the respondents faced. Two problem areas emerged as particularly important: difficulties in taking information down from the blackboard; and writing essays. The respondents probably encountered difficulties within these areas because teaching pace was too fast within the classroom: as well as the problems experienced in expressing their thoughts on paper. The significance of the respondents experiencing difficulties within these areas is that this group will potentially not be achieving the academic success they need to achieve the *access* qualification.

Access programmes are providing people with dyslexia with an opportunity to improve their lives, but this research has shown that the existing systems may be making it more difficult for some dyslexics to optimise their use of this educational opportunity. It seems ironic that there is a current emphasis on life long learning, reflected through the Government's Green Paper – "The Learning Age" (DfEE, 1998a), but little consideration of the barriers which non-traditional groups, such as dyslexics, face when they are accessing this educational opportunity. As a result of the limited recognition of dyslexia, it is possible that there are circumstances out of the individual's control which have the potential to prevent this group from improving their lives through educational programmes such as *access*.

14:2 Theoretical framework and methodology

By drawing together the conclusions from the research, it is necessary to remind the reader why the theoretical framework and methodology was adopted.

The strength of the theoretical framework and methodology used to explore these dyslexic students' experience of *access* is that it has met with a suggested strategy to undertaking disability research (Stone and Priestly, 1996). This was reflected through the researcher adopting a Critical Social Research approach to explore the respondent's experiences of *access*. A Critical Social Research approach was adopted because of its commitment towards challenging oppression, therefore intending to improve the position of dyslexic students within the educational environment. The commitment of the researcher towards following a disability research strategy was reflected by the study adopting the social model of disability to explain the respondents' encounters and by casting these individuals as the experts when recalling their experience of *access*.

One weakness of the research strategy, is that it may not be recognised as valid research by the academic community. However, the use of Grounded Theory to analyse the respondents' encounters would aim to answer this criticism, therefore show that this investigation of *access* was a rigorous and systematic study.

The realist approach can further answer possible criticisms about the research strategy. Layder (1993) advocates a research strategy based on middle range theory and grounded theory. The researcher has adopted a similar mixed approach to investigate dyslexic students' experience of *access* environment.

14:3 Recommendations

In recognising that there is a need to remove or reduce the barriers dyslexic people face within the educational environment if they are to achieve academic success, there follows a series of recommendations to improve the opportunities available to this group.

Recommendations for Compulsory Education:

The respondents clearly experienced many difficulties which resulted directly and indirectly from the lack of general knowledge in the public domain about dyslexia. Therefore a key recommendation is to introduce material on dyslexia (and other disabilities) into both teacher training programmes and pupil curriculum in the Primary and Secondary sectors. Such materials should include opportunities to address questions such as: "What are the academic and social barriers experienced by people with dyslexia in a school environment?" There should also be a consideration of issues such as: "the impact dyslexia (and other disabilities) can have both on the student directly concerned and also on others with whom they study." The significance of introducing modules on dyslexia into the Compulsory Education curriculum is that it may facilitate students and staff to develop their understanding of this disability within the educational environment. This development will help to move away from the current barriers the respondents highlighted, such as the uncertainty over whether or not they would encounter staff who would have an understanding of dyslexia.

The introduction of modules on dyslexia into Compulsory Education could further help to tackle the wider barriers dyslexic students face within this sector. By helping to raise awareness of dyslexia between teachers and students the increase of knowledge could contribute towards challenging the existing support structures such as special educational needs such as the Statementing process. This would

include showing that Statementing is failing to recognise and support pupils with dyslexia as recognised by the Audit Commission (1992,1992a and 1992b). Introducing modules on dyslexia could also increase the chance of individuals with this disability achieving academic success; as well as encountering a greater awareness of this disability, which could contribute towards challenging the negative images of dyslexia in the wider society. The result of dyslexics experiencing "dyslexia aware" schools is that they may be encouraged to progress on, to College or University, which would help to improve their life opportunities.

Recommendations for Further Education:

Respondents anxieties clustered around worries about repetition of their previous negative experiences. To encourage dyslexic people to return to education there is a need to more actively promote courses such as *access* programmes. One option would be to invite past dyslexic students to talk about their experiences of *access* to prospective or newly enrolled students. The significance of this form of awareness raising is that it may contribute towards dyslexic students not feeling "different" or "out of place" when they discover their disability, as highlighted by the research, such as through the experiences of Jenny. This form of awareness raising may also allow dyslexics to become aware of the help available at their selected Colleges.

Using dyslexic students as "case studies" could help to re-assure individuals wishing to return to education, such as Simon and Tom, that their return to education would not be a repeat of their previous negative encounters. The significance of using dyslexic students among the case studies is that it would help to show that educational programmes such as *access* are designed to meet the needs of this particular group.

Respondents found Disability Organisations had little knowledge of opportunities for returning to education. To further show to students with dyslexia that their return to education will be a positive experience, Institutions could consider promoting *access* programmes through disability organisations such as the Adult Dyslexia Organisation (ADO). The implication of *access* being promoted through Disability Organisations is that it may help to show that Further Education is accessible to dyslexics, which has the potential to further increase student numbers. The forming of close links between *access* programmes and Disability Organisations could further indicate to dyslexics, such as Jane and Daniel, that education providers have an understanding of the barriers this group face, and are therefore committed to making this sector more accessible. The promotion of *access* through adult Disability Organisations would help to show a commitment towards learning as:

...essential to a strong economy and an inclusive society. (DfEE, 1988a, p.11).

The use of case studies and the forming of links with Disability Organisations has the potential to provide a dyslexic with the same educational opportunities as their non-disabled peers. Therefore opening up similar career opportunities, which could contribute towards challenging some of the barriers dyslexic people face within society.

A major issue for all the respondents and all other access students was general financial support. If *access* is to encourage dyslexic people, to return to education, there is a need to provide appropriate financial support. One option would be to provide a system of loans to assist adults when they decide to return to education. The value of this approach is that it may help to overcome one of the problems with *access*, which is that, irrespective of whether the student is dyslexic, these individuals are not eligible for any grants from their Local Educational Authority.

The impact of this new funding approach would be that it could reduce the respondents' reliance on their families or partner for financial assistance during their studies. This form of financial assistance could be repaid once the individual starts working, such as through a higher rate of National Insurance.

Whilst the concept of increased debt may raise objections, the availability of adequate financial support may encourage the individual to make the move into education which will eventually probably improve their earning power. Hence the new funding opportunity provides dyslexic adults with an equal chance to achieve academic success with their studies therefore obtain increased life opportunities through new career prospects.

These respondents had difficulty obtaining suitable equipment and other support to assist them with their studies. It is therefore necessary to provide a grant similar to the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to help this group obtain equipment and specialist dyslexia support. The current support provision seems to be failing to meet the needs of this group, as only some of the respondents such as Daniel and James, were fortunate enough to attend a College which was able to loan these individuals computers to assist them with their studies. The advantage of making available a grant, similar to the Disabled Students' Allowance, is that it may help to create level playing field for dyslexic students, and therefore help to remove the variation of support, which was one of the barriers these individuals faced. The impact of not being able to access equipment to support their studies was that these individuals will not be able to achieve the academic success of which they are capable.

Those respondents who managed to obtain access to equipment often reported that little or no training was made available to enable them to rapidly acquire the necessary information technology skills. Therefore it is recommended that, as with

the Higher Education Disabled Students' Allowance, Colleges should make available training sessions for the dyslexic students to optimise their use of the available equipment.

Moving on to improving the experiences of dyslexic students enrolled on *access*, respondents' comments clearly indicate that there is a need to build on existing knowledge of dyslexia within Further Education. One route forward would be to require all institutional teaching and support staff to undertake training on dyslexia. This training should include "what is dyslexia?" and "the impact it has on the individual whilst they are studying." This approach is that it increases the chance of dyslexics coming into contact with academics and support staff who are aware of this disability, therefore reducing the chance of future students encountering the negative experiences highlighted by academics such as Riddick (1996) and respondents such as Tom. When looking to raise knowledge of dyslexia, it is important for students who have experience of this disability to be involved, as these individuals are the best experts on their disability (Stone and Priestly, 1996) and the difficulties they face within the educational environment. The value of undertaking training on dyslexia issues is that it helps to maintain the profile of this disability, and keep staff up to date with developments within this field.

The respondents' experiences of encountering good relations with each other, such as reported by Jane and Tom, were a major feature of the positive experience. Colleges could also establish a dyslexic peer support system within their institution. The value of this peer support would be that it could help students who discover they are dyslexic to develop a greater understanding of this disability through bringing these individuals together. The bringing together of dyslexic students could also contribute towards these individuals becoming more aware of the help available within and outside their Institutions.

By increasing the profile of dyslexia through these two routes it is possible that this form of awareness arising could go some way towards challenging the barriers that dyslexics face within Further Education (Palfreman-Kay, 1998) and in the wider society.

Respondents clearly identified difficulties in obtaining a "diagnostic" assessment for this disability. There is a clear need for the Further Educational Funding Council to provide additional funds to institutions [ideally in the current year] to permit them to refer the student to an Educational Psychologist. Respondents became aware, from delays and staff comments, that there were difficulties because of the costs of formal assessments.

In any case, if this option was not adopted a set of national guidelines for Learning Support Tutors to follow, when establishing whether or not an individual is dyslexic, could be developed, or at least Learning Support Tutors should be encouraged to under the existing RSA certificate on specific learning difficulties. The value of the learning support tutor deciding whether or not an individual is dyslexic is that it can quickly, and cost effectively, establish whether or not a student is displaying the characteristics of this disability. The availability of new funding or national guidelines is that it is possible individuals will discover their disability, therefore improving the chance of accessing available support, which increases the prospects of achieving academic success.

Since respondents so valued the positive relationships they developed with other students, it is recommended that to improve the chances of dyslexics having a positive academic and social experience whilst enrolled on *access* there is a need to actively promote a positive working relationship between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students. The examples given the respondents, as well as the research of academics such as Stephenson and Percy (1989), would suggest that a positive

working relationship is achievable. The advantage of this approach is that it would help to raise awareness of dyslexia and the barriers this group can face such as the difficulties in writing essays whilst on *access*. Other developments could be to use dyslexic students, who have previously been enrolled on *access* programmes to talk about their experiences to fellow students. The value of this approach:

...is that it would enable new students to formulate their expectations. The use of previous students would also help to make new students aware of the support available for those experiencing difficulties and may assist the promotion of disability awareness of non-disabled students. (Palfreman-Kay and Taylor, 2000, p.51).

Asking dyslexic students to share their experiences more inclusive educational environment, through helping this group to overcome the barriers they face, such as the lack of understanding about dyslexia within this sector.

A further way forward to improve the help available to dyslexics within Further Education is to encourage the Further Educational Funding Council to develop a set of national guidelines for the support of this group. Some basic requirements for dyslexics would be the right to have a computer and access to a Support Tutor to facilitate the development of suitable study skills. Policy makers within this sector could possibly look to recent developments within Higher Education, such as the National Working Party on Dyslexia (1999), or the base line provision report produced by the Higher Educational Funding Council (HEFCE, 99/04) as a guide for establishing a set of national standards. Given a set of national standards, dyslexics could expect the same level of support at whatever Institution they attend, therefore helping to remove the variation in support available to this group of students which was revealed through the findings of the Learning Support staff questionnaire in Chapter twelve. This development is particularly needed because it may help Colleges of Further Education to meet their new responsibilities under the Human Rights Act, 2000 and the forthcoming Disability Rights in Education

Bill which will be brought in during 2000/2001 parliamentary period into English legislation.

Respondents' comments on their classroom experience indicate the importance of making the *access* curriculum more accessible to dyslexics. It is vital that lecturers and Support Tutors work together. This raises understanding of dyslexia, encourages lecturers to develop teaching strategies (based on the advice of a support tutor) that would help their subject material to become more accessible. This development could contribute towards reducing the variation in the knowledge of dyslexia displayed by academic staff, reflected throughout this research and the work of Riddick (1996). The impact of this collaborative approach to teaching and learning is that it would improve the chance of dyslexics achieving academic success, therefore encountering the same life opportunities as their non-disabled peers.

Lecturers and Learning Support Staff should perhaps be encouraged to obtain British Dyslexia Association Approved Teachers status (BDA, T07b: 2000), which would require these professionals to have an understanding of dyslexia and the learning needs of this group. The value of lecturers and Learning Support Staff acquiring this status is that it would help to embed the knowledge of dyslexia within the educational environment.

The respondents valued their relationships with other students. *Access* programmes could encourage students to provide support to each other, whether or not they are dyslexic, through peer support programmes. Through *access* students providing support to each other it would help these individuals to develop team-working skills, as well as gain an understanding of how dyslexia affects the individual. The research of Karkalas and Mackenzie (1995), indicated

that working together improved academic self-confidence and feelings of self worth.

Finally one general recommendation is that there is a clear need for the Disability Movement and others to encourage public perceptions of disability to change. The current "image" is concerned almost entirely with visible forms of disability. The updated "image" should be clearly framed so as to explicitly include "hidden" disabilities such as dyslexia and mental health problems, plus recognition of the "disabling" nature of some social expectations and requirements.

14:4 Future work

When considering any future work within the field of disability and education it is important to follow a Critical Social Research approach. The significance of following this approach in social research is that there is a commitment towards improving the position of disabled people, such as people with dyslexia. By revealing the oppression this group faces, as well as suggesting ways in which these individuals and other minority groups can improve their position within society, the situation can be encouraged to change.

One area which the researcher is currently aware has not been investigated is concerned with establishing whether other groups of disabled students such as hearing impaired and visually impaired adults, are enrolling on *access* programmes. The significance of this work is that it would help to establish whether *access* is providing particular groups, or a cross-section, of disabled people with a second chance to achieve academic success. The value of this insight is that it helps to establish whether or not there is a need for educational providers to develop *access* programmes to be more responsive to the needs of disabled people.

Another area for future work is in establishing whether or not *access* has actually improved the life opportunities available to disabled people who decided to return to education. This could be achieved through exploring the experiences of disabled adults, such as dyslexic people, who finished their *access* programme, whether they furthered their education or entered the working world. The value of undertaking this piece of work is that it would establish whether *access* is genuinely providing the individual with the necessary skills and experiences to improve their lives, and hence whether access programmes are achieving their original aim.

Appendices

Appendix 1(a)

Stage 1 of the research

Semi-structured Staff interview schedule

1. Can you tell me about your general experiences of disabled students enrolled on *access* programmes?
2. How many disabled students are enrolled on *access* programmes?
 - a. What type of disability?
3. Can you tell me if disabled students declare their disability before they start *access*?
4. Can you tell me if disabled students discover their disability whilst on *access*?
5. How do disabled students fare on their *access* programme?
6. What type of support is available for disabled students enrolled on *access* programmes?
7. What is the reaction of academic staff to disabled students enrolled on *access* programmes?
8. What are the funding opportunities available to disabled students enrolled on *access* programmes?
9. Could you put me in touch with dyslexic and deaf students who enrolled on *access* programmes starting next September 1997-98?

Appendix 1(b)

Stage 1 of the research

Semi-structured Student interview schedule

1. Why did you decide to undertake an *access* course?
2. Why did you decide on this particular college?
3. When did you discover that you were dyslexic / deaf?
4. Did you declare your disability?
5. Were you contacted about the support available to you at the college?
6. What type of support was offered to you at the college?
7. Have you received any college disability literature?
8. What do you think of the support that is offered to you?
9. How did you find the pace of the course?
10. What has been your experience of using course material?
11. What is your experience of:
 - a. tutorials?
 - b. small group work?
 - c. lecturers?
12. How would you describe your contact with other students?
13. What are your experiences of the work and study environment?
14. How have you been able to manage financially whilst completing your *access* course?

Appendix 2(a)

Stage 2 of the research

Conversation with the respondents taking part in the research

1. Tell me what are the important things for you being on *access*?
2. Tell me what are the important things for you being dyslexic?

Appendix 2(b)

Stage 2 of the research

Experiences of education before access. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

1. What was your attitude towards education before *access*?
2. What was your experience of education before *access*?
 - a. School:
 - i. Primary
 - ii. Secondary
 - b. Further education.
 - c. Higher Education.
3. Did your parents encourage you to obtain an education?
4. When did you discover that you were dyslexic?
5. Were you tested for dyslexia before you enrolled on *access*?
6. Did you receive any support to help you cope with dyslexia before *access*?
 - a. Academic staff.
 - b. Learning support staff.
 - c. Parents.
 - d. Friends.
7. How would you describe your contact with other students?
 - a. Did you feel different?
 - b. Did any of your fellow students display any dyslexia awareness?
 - c. Did you feel your fellow students labelled you?
 - d. Did the attitude of fellow students affect your self-esteem?
8. In your previous education what was your experience of written material and coursework?
9. How did you find the pace of the course?
 - a. Did you enjoy some subjects more than others?

- b. Do you think this covered up your dyslexia?
- c. Did you develop any coping strategies?
- d. Did the support of your friend's help?

10. What was your experience of the learning environment?

a. Classroom.

- i. Did the teacher provide handouts?
- ii. Could you understand these handouts?
- iii. Did the teacher speak loud enough for you to understand him / her in the classroom?
- iv. Was the teacher available for consultation after the class?
- v. Did you feel part of the class?
- vi. Could you understand what was being discussed?
- vii. Did you feel you had furthered your knowledge of the topic as a result of the class?

b. Lectures.

- i. Did the lecturer provide handouts?
- ii. Could you understand these handouts?
- iii. Did the lecturer speak loud enough for you to understand him / her in the lecture?
- iv. Was the lecturer available for consultation after the lecture?
- v. Did you feel part of the lecture?
- vi. Could you understand what was being discussed?
- vii. Did you feel you had furthered your knowledge of the topic as a result of the lecture?

c. Seminars / Small Group Work.

- i. Did the tutor provide handouts?
- ii. Could you understand these handouts?
- iii. Did the tutor speak loud enough for you to understand him / her in the Seminars / Small Group Work?
- iv. Was the tutor available for consultation after the Seminars / Small Group Work?
- v. Did you feel part of the Seminar / Small Group Work?
- vi. Could you understand what was being discussed?
- vii. Did you feel you had furthered your knowledge of the topic as a result of the Seminar / Small Group Work?

d. Tutorials.

- i. Did the tutor provide handouts?
- ii. Could you understand these handouts?
- iii. Did the tutor speak loud enough for you to understand him / her in the tutorial?
- iv. Was the tutor available for consultation after the class?
- v. Did you feel part of the tutorial?
- vi. Could you understand what was being discussed?
- vii. Did you feel you had furthered your knowledge of the topic as a result of the tutorial?

11. What was your relationship between yourself and academic staff?

- a. Did academic staff encourage you to do well?
- b. Did the attitude of academic staff towards you effect your self-confidence?
- c. Did academic staff label you?
- d. Did academic staff display any dyslexia awareness?

Appendix 2(c)

Stage 2 of the research

Experiences of starting access. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

1. What did you do before you enrolled in an *access* course?
2. How did you find out about *access*?
 - a. Through a friend?
 - b. Local publicity?
 - c. College publicity?
 - d. Personal recommendation?
3. Why did you decide to undertake an *access* course?
 - a. Career change?
 - b. An opportunity to learn?
 - c. An entry route into higher education?
 - e. An opportunity for personal development?
4. Why did you decide on this particular college to undertake an *access* course?
 - a. Locality?
 - b. An established reputation in supporting disabled students?
 - c. An established provision in supporting disabled students?
5. Has *access* opened up new opportunities?
 - a. An opportunity to gain formal qualifications?
 - b. An opportunity to learn new skills?
6. How did your partner, family and friends react to you undertaking an *access* course?
 - a. Have they been supportive and encouraging?
 - b. Was there a negative reaction?
 - c. How did you deal with this?

7. How did you feel about your return to education through *access*?

- a. Did you feel that you could cope?
- b. Did you feel you could achieve the *access* qualification?
- c. Do you still feel you can achieve the *access* qualification?
- d. Do you feel you have developed your self-confidence?

8. What attracted you to the *access* course instead of other educational qualifications such as A level's?

- a. Personal recommendation from individuals such as friend or careers officer?
- b. An opportunity to study with matures students?
- c. Was it the attitude of *access* staff?
- d. Preparation for the jump into higher education?

9. Can you tell me what specific elements of *access* attracted you to the course?

- a. The flexible structure of the course?
- b. The opportunity to study a course which required no or little previous knowledge of the subject(s)?
- c. An opportunity to undertake additional qualifications such as GCSE's?
- d. Less pressure than other qualifications such as A Level's?
- e. Has *access* so far been less pressurised than other educational routes into higher education?

10. What are you getting out of *access*?

Appendix 2(d)

Stage 2 of the research

Experiences of being dyslexic whilst on access. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

1. Were you assessed for dyslexia before you started *access*?
 - a. School.
 - b. College.
 - c. University.
 - d. Local dyslexia organisation.
2. Can you tell me if you declared your dyslexia or difficulties before you started *access*?
 - a. When enquiring about the course.
 - b. On the application form.
 - c. When interviewed for a place on the course.
 - d. Were you contacted by college disability service?
3. Can you tell me who suggested that you might be dyslexic?
 - a. Academic staff.
 - b. Partner.
 - c. Family.
 - d. Friends.
4. How did you feel before you where assessed for dyslexia?
5. Can you tell me how long it took for you to be diagnosed as dyslexic?
 - a. Who arranged the assessment?
 - b. Who conducted the assessment?
 - c. How long did it take for you to receive a copy of the assessment?
 - d. Who paid for the assessment?
 - e. Was your dyslexia explained to you?
 - f. How many dyslexia assessments have you undertook.
 - i. Within the college?
 - ii. Outside the college?

6. Can you tell me how you felt when you discovered that you were dyslexic?
- a. Angry.
 - b. Pleased.
 - c. Did you want to go back to college.
7. What was the reaction of partner, friends and family when they became aware that you were dyslexic?
- a. Supportive and encouraging.
 - b. Was there a negative reaction?
 - c. How has this effected you?
8. Were you given any college disability literature when the college became aware of your dyslexia?
- a. College literature.
 - b. Outside user-organisations.
9. What was the reaction of *access* staff when they became aware that you were dyslexic?
- a. Supportive and encouraging.
 - b. Was there a negative reaction?
 - c. How has this effected you?
10. Can you tell me if you were made aware of support groups when you discovered your dyslexia?
- a. Within the college.
 - b. Outside the college.
11. Have you been made aware of additional grants with you being dyslexia?
- a. For Further Education.
 - b. For Higher Education.
12. How has your dyslexia effected you whilst you have been on *access*?
- a. Effected your academic work.
 - b. Effected you socially.

- c. Effect on self-confidence.
- d. Did you wish to hide it from staff and fellow students?

Appendix 2(e)

Stage 2 of the research

Experiences of support whilst on access. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me if you received any support before you started *access*?

- a. School.
- b. College.
- c. University.

2. Please tell me how you have accessed the support that was available to you whilst on *access*?

- a. Was support arranged before you started *access*?
- b. Were you told to go to the support service?
- c. Did the support service get in touch with you?
- d. How long has it taken to arrange the support package?
- e. Were you involved in deciding the support package?

3. Please tell me about the support that was available to you whilst on *access*?

- a. One to one support.
- b. Group work.
- c. Do you meet once per week?
- d. Do you have *access* to a support tutor(s)?
- e. Is the support subject specific?
- f. Does the support focus on improving your written English skills?
- g. Do the support sessions show you learning strategies?
- h. Do the support sessions show you coping strategies?
- i. Do the support sessions show you planning strategies?
- j. Extra time in exams.
- k. A scribe for exams.
- l. Essay extensions.
- m. Structuring, planning and proof reading of essays.

4. Can you tell me if you have been provided with any equipment to support you on *access*?

- a. Computers.
- b. Tape recorders such as Dictaphones.
- c. Have you been shown how to use this equipment?
- d. Does the equipment help you to cope with *access* i.e. make changes and keep up to date with work?

5. Would you mind telling me if academic staff have offered to provide you with any extra support?

- a. Extra teaching time.
- b. Providing handouts.
- c. Providing handouts in alternative formats e.g. different coloured paper.
- d. Providing lecture notes.
- e. Proof reading coursework.
- f. Help to plan and organise coursework.
- g. Taking dyslexia into consideration when marking coursework.
- h. Have academic staff talked to you about your dyslexia?
- i. Provide support to prepare you for higher education.

6. Would you mind telling me if your partner, family, friends or other students have provided you with support whilst on *access*?

- a. Proof reading coursework.
- b. Helping you to plan and organise your workload.
- c. Help you to prepare work for submission.

7. Please tell me the reaction of your partner, friends and family to you receiving support whilst on *access*?

- a. Supportive and encouraging.
- b. Negative.
- c. How has this effected you?

8. Can you tell me if learning support staff have helped you to apply for additional grants?

- a. Further education.
- b. Higher education.

9. What do you think of the support that is provided to you whilst on *access*?

- a. Is it meeting your needs?

10. Can you tell me if the support you are receiving is helping you to cope with *access*?

Appendix 2(f)

Stage 2 of the research

Experiences of student relations whilst on access. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me about your experiences of contact with other students at your college?
2. Would you mind telling me if you have disclosed your dyslexia to fellow students?
 - a. Have you decided to keep the dyslexia to yourself?
 - b. Concerned about there being a negative reaction?
 - c. Are you embarrassed about disclosing that you are dyslexic?
 - d. Was there surprise shown when you disclosed your dyslexia?
 - e. Unsure how fellow students would react?
 - f. Has your disability isolated you from fellow students?
 - g. Did they already think that you were dyslexic?
 - h. Do you think your fellow students admire you for coming on *access*?
3. Would you mind telling me if the various subjects you are studying created opportunities to meet new people?
 - a. *Access* students.
 - b. Students on other courses within the college.
 - c. Is it easier to study with mature students than younger students?
 - d. Does studying with mature students' help to motivate you?
 - e. Is there are difference between studying with mature and younger students?
 - f. Has a feeling of unity or camaraderie developed between the *access* students?
4. Please tell me if fellow students have provided you with any support?
 - a. Have fellow students offered to provide support with academic work?
 - b. Offered to provide notes.
 - c. Offered to collect handouts.
 - d. Offered to read assignments.
 - e. Shown you coping strategies.
 - f. Acted as a scribe.
 - g. Have provided help with specific subjects.
 - h. Have you provided non-disabled students with support?

5. Can you tell me if fellow *access* students have displayed any disability awareness?

- a. An understanding or lack of understanding of the different levels of dyslexia?
- b. An understanding or lack of understanding of the way dyslexia effects you?
- c. Do you feel it is important for fellow students to understand what dyslexia is?
- d. Do you feel different to other students?

6. Have you met any other disabled students whilst enrolled in *access*?

- a. Met other dyslexic students?
- b. Met students with other disabilities?
- c. Encouraged un-diagnosed dyslexics to seek help and go for an assessment?
- d. Provided support to each other.
- e. Have you formed better relations than fellow disabled students instead of non-disabled students?
- f. Are you aware of disabled students struggling with *access*?
- g. Do you feel you have formed a partnership between yourself and other disabled students?

7. Would you mind telling me if you have felt part of the student body?

8. Please tell me if *access* has encouraged you now to make new friends?

- a. Has the support provided you with the self-confidence?
- b. Has it made you envious of non-disabled students?

9. Can you tell me if you have discussed academic work with fellow *access* students?

- a. Are you prepared to show other students your work for help and advice?
- b. Are you able to work in groups for assignments and presentations?
- c. Have fellow students shown or shared coping strategies with you?
- d. Have fellow students encouraged you to stick with *access*?
- e. Have the positive relations you have formed helped you to discuss work?

10. Can you tell if *access* is more than just an academic experience?

- a. Has the structure of *access* allowed you to form good relations with fellow students?
- b. Has the pace of *access* allowed you to form good relations with fellow students?

- c. Are fellow students just interested in getting the *access* qualification?
- d. Have your outside commitments made it difficult to form good relations?

11. What have you gained from your contact with fellow students?

- a. Will you stay in contact with the students you have met on *access*?

Appendix 2(g)

Stage 2 of the research

Experiences of coping financially whilst on *access*. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me how you have managed financially whilst on *access*?

- a. State benefits.
- b. Partner.
- c. Parents.
- d. Relatives.
- e. Grants i.e. local authority, trusts or charities.
- f. Bank overdraft.
- g. Bank loan.

2. Would you mind telling me if the structure of *access* has allowed you to work?

- a. Part-time.
- b. Full-time.

3. Can you tell me if you having to work has effected the amount of time you have been able to spend on *access*?

4. Has the requirement to work whilst on *access* affected your relationships with your partner, family, parents or friends?

- a. Positive.
- b. Negative.

5. Would you mind telling me if you have had to make financial sacrifices whilst on *access*?

- a. Selling personal possessions.
- b. Taking out loans.

6. Would you mind telling me if you have applied for additional grants for your disability?

- a. Further education.

b. Higher education.

7. Can you tell me if the financial commitment required of *access* has affected your social life?

Appendix 2(h)

Stage 2 of the research

Experiences of academic elements of *access*. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me if you view *access* as an opportunity to perform academically better than your earlier experiences of education?

- a. An opportunity to learn the basic things not learnt earlier within your education.
- b. Concern those earlier poor experiences would be repeated?

2. Would you mind telling me if some parts of the course were better than others?

- a. Have you enjoyed some subjects more than others?
- b. Have you experienced difficulty with some subjects?
- c. Have the subjects you liked encouraged you to work harder?
- d. Did you have the option to select your *access* subjects?
- e. Do you feel you needed a basic knowledge of the subjects you have selected?

3. Can you tell me how you find the pace of *access*?

- a. Intense?
- b. Difficulties in keeping up – keeping your head above water?
- c. Did the discovery of dyslexia help you to cope?
- d. Has the structure of *access* helped you to cope?
- e. Did the confirmation of your dyslexia help you to keep up with the workload and overcome any difficulties you faced?
- f. Have you had to change subjects because you found it difficult to cope?
- g. Important not to miss classes because there is a lot of information to be learnt.
- h. Experienced problems with interpreting information.

4. Please tell me your experiences of the work and study environment?

- a. Library.
- b. Buildings you studied in.
- c. Learning support areas.
- d. Do not want to look different such as someone with a problem.
- e. Equipment available such as computers and photocopiers.
- f. Have you a specific room in which you can study?

5. Can you tell me about your experience of the classroom environment?

- a. Difficulties in taking down information from the blackboard & whiteboard.
- b. Difficulties in taking down information through formal dictation.
- c. Do you dominate the classroom?
- d. Do you find individual small classes of benefit?
- e. Did the discovery of dyslexia improve your experience of the classroom environment?
- f. Have you gained more from informal instead of formal lessons?
- g. Have you experienced difficulties in maintaining your concentration levels?
- h. Did the class size get smaller as the course progressed?
- i. Were you aware of other students (disabled & non-disabled) having difficulty?
- j. Did you feel different within the classroom environment?
- k. Are you frightened to take notes because of spelling mistakes?

6. What was your experience of:

i. Classroom.

- a. Did the teacher provide handouts?
- b. Could you understand these handouts?
- c. Did the teacher speak loud enough for you to understand him / her in the classroom?
- d. Was the teacher available for consultation after the class?
- e. Did you feel part of the class?
- f. Could you understand what was being discussed?
- g. Did you feel you had furthered your knowledge of the topic as a result of the class?

ii. Lectures.

- a. Did the lecturer provide handouts?
- b. Could you understand these handouts?
- c. Did the lecturer speak loud enough for you to understand him / her in the lecture?
- d. Was the lecturer available for consultation after the lecture?
- e. Did you feel part of the lecture?
- f. Could you understand what was being discussed?
- g. Did you feel you had furthered your knowledge of the topic as a result of the lecture?

iii. Seminars / Small Group Work.

- a. Did the tutor provide handouts?
- b. Could you understand these handouts?
- c. Did the tutor speak loud enough for you to understand him / her in the Seminars / Small Group Work?
- d. Was the tutor available for consultation after the Seminars / Small Group Work?
- e. Did you feel part of the Seminar / Small Group Work?
- f. Could you understand what was being discussed?
- g. Did you feel you had furthered your knowledge of the topic as a result of the Seminar / Small Group Work?

iv. Tutorials.

- a. Did the tutor provide handouts?
- b. Could you understand these handouts?
- c. Did the tutor speak loud enough for you to understand him / her in the tutorial?
- d. Was the tutor available for consultation after the class?
- e. Did you feel part of the tutorial?
- f. Could you understand what was being discussed?
- g. Did you feel you had furthered your knowledge of the topic as a result of the tutorial?

7. Can you tell me if you have used any coping strategies to cope with the academic requirements of *access*?

- a. Coping strategies that you have used earlier within your education.
- b. Coping strategies that you have been shown through your support.

8. Can you tell me if you feel the academic elements of *access* have prepared you for higher education?

- a. Have you found the assignments helping to prepare you for a degree?
- b. Do you view *access* as an academic gateway – prepares you for further study?

9. Can you tell me about your experience of writing assignments as part of *access*?

- a. Do you spend a lot of time e.g. four hours on a two-page essay?
- b. Important that you can have a second go at essays.
- c. Important that you are told where you are going wrong before you re-submit.
- d. Have essay deadlines helped to motivate you?
- e. Experienced difficulties with particular pieces of course work such as the extended essay.

- f. Have you required essay extensions?
- g. Experienced difficulty with understanding feedback?

10. Would you mind telling me your experience of undertaking examinations as part of *access*?

- a. Will you be using extra-time available to you?
- b. Do you have a fear of sitting examinations?
- c. Did you feel more confident when sitting in an exam?
- d. Did you feel a sense of achievement after you completed an exam?
- e. Do you do better with continuous assessment than examinations?

11. Please tell me if the support you have received has helped improve your studies?

- a. Provided you with the confidence to tackle the academic work.
- b. Has it provided you with different strategies to cope with the work?
- c. Have additional workshop sessions for English and Maths been useful?

12. Would you mind telling me if you have learnt new skills through the academic elements of *access*?

- a. How to use computers.
- b. Reading, writing and preparation skills for essays.

13. Can you tell me if the support of your partner, family and friends has helped you to cope with the academic elements of *access*?

14. Would you mind telling me if you are undertaking additional qualifications whilst on *access*?

- a. GCSE's.
- b. AS Levels.
- c. A Levels.
- d. Have you been able to cope with *access* whilst studying these additional qualifications?

15. Please tell me about your relationship with academic staff on *access*?

- a. Have they provided extra support e.g. filling out university application forms?
- b. Provide general advice e.g. what to expect at university interviews.
- c. Have they identified your academic weaknesses?

- d. Have they openly stated your disability in the classroom?
- e. Have they provided help with specific elements of *access*?
- f. Have they provided feedback on coursework?
- g. Have they encouraged you to do well?
- h. Have support staff been helpful e.g. computer and library staff?
- i. Have you approached academic staff for help with subjects you could not understand?
- j. Have you had to hassle staff to receive help?
- k. Have you had to drop subjects because the lecture was not interested?
- l. Did you find it difficult to seek help because of your outside commitments?
- m. Did it take too long to obtain tutorial dates?
- o. Have individual teaching styles being positive or negative?
- p. Have lecturers asked you why you have not turned up?
- q. Have you found it embarrassing where you have gone wrong – reminds you of earlier educational experiences?
- r. Have academic staff tried to discourage you because of your dyslexia?
- s. Do you feel staff treat you differently because you are a mature student?

16. Can you tell me if you feel you progressively improved academically whilst enrolled on *access*?

- a. Do you feel that you have performed better in the first year?
- b. Have you thought about dropping out?

17. Would you mind telling me about your experience of using the course material?

- a. Handouts.
- b. Does the use of handouts allow you to concentrate more on understanding the subject material?
- c. Difficult to read handouts on black and white paper – white and black merged together.
- d. Handouts produced in alternative formats to overcome this problem e.g. blue transparencies over the text.
- e. Have academic staff made the course material interesting?
- f. Did your experience improve after staff became aware of your dyslexia?
- g. Did you experience difficulties in giving presentations?
- h. Have you experienced difficulty in meeting the requirements for classes such as completing the required reading?
- i. Uncertain about how to present material.

18. Do you feel you have gained anything from your academic experience of *access*?

a. Positive or negative experience of education.

b. Did you think your earlier experiences of education would be repeated?

Appendix 2(i)

Stage 2 of the research

Learning support tutor experience of supporting dyslexic students on *access*. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me what your responsibilities as a dyslexia support tutor are?
2. Can you tell me about the support and resources available to dyslexics on *access*?
3. Can you tell me what support and resources you would require to adequately support dyslexic students on *access*?
4. To what extent do you think you have been able to support the dyslexic students enrolled in *access*?

Appendix 2(j)

Stage 2 of the research

Learning Support Questionnaire

**DISABLED PEOPLE AND THE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES INTO
HIGHER EDUCATION**

College A

LEARNING SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

TO:

I am reviewing the support provision available for dyslexic students enrolled on *access* courses at the colleges of further education that are affiliated to De Montfort University.

Please take five minutes to complete this questionnaire and return to: James M Palfreman-Kay, Department of Social and Community Studies, Faculty of Health & Community Studies, De Montfort University, Scraptoft Campus, Leicester LE7 9SU Tel: (0116) 2577878 E-mail: jmpk@DMU.ac.uk

1. *Have all students been made aware of how their dyslexia effects them?*

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

.....

.....

.....

2. *Have all dyslexic students given their permission for you to talk to academic staff about their dyslexia?*

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

.....

.....
.....

3. Have all dyslexic students been provided with Study Skills material?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

.....
.....
.....

4. Have all dyslexic student accessed Study Skills Support for Improving essay writing?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

.....
.....

5. Has additional funding been provided to purchase equipment for dyslexic students e.g. Dictaphones?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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6. Have all dyslexic students used the Open Learning Centre for support with their studies?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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7. Have all dyslexic students borrowed equipment through the Open Learning Centre?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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8. Have all dyslexic students sought support from access tutors?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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9. Have all dyslexic students been provided with pastoral support?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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10. Have all dyslexic students been provided support through outside disability organisations?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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11. Have all dyslexic students been referred to learning support staff through academic staff?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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12. Have all dyslexic students regularly used the Open Learning Centre for support with their studies?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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13. Have all dyslexic students been involved in deciding the support package available to them?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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14. Have all dyslexic students taken up the offer of written English support?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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15. Have all dyslexic students undertaken the offer of planning strategies e.g. Mind mapping?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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16. Have all dyslexic students taken up the offer to help to prepare for revision timetables each week?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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17. Have all dyslexic students contacted you about the support available before they enrolled on access?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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18. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of workshop support?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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19. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of on-course support?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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20. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of extra time for examinations?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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21. Have all dyslexic students taken up the provision of essay support?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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22. Have all dyslexic students identified their support needs at the interview stage for access?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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23. Have all dyslexic students been assessed in-house whilst enrolled on access?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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24. Have all dyslexic students been assessed by an Educational Psychologist?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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25. Have all dyslexic students had regular contact with Learning support staff?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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26 Any further comments

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(Please continue overleaf)

Thank you for your co-operation.

Completed by:..... Contact No:

Appendix 2(k) Stage 2 of the research

Learning Support Questionnaire

**DISABLED PEOPLE AND THE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES INTO
HIGHER EDUCATION**

College B

LEARNING SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

To:

I am reviewing the support provision available for dyslexic students enrolled on *access* courses at the colleges of further education that are affiliated to De Montfort University.

Please take five minutes to complete this questionnaire and return to: James M Palfreman-Kay, Department of Social and Community Studies, Faculty of Health & Community Studies, De Montfort University, Scraptoft Campus, Leicester LE7 9SU Tel: (0116) 2577878 E-mail: jmpk@DMU.ac.uk

1. *Have all dyslexic students sought support with their studies?*
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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2. *Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of individual support?*
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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3. Have dyslexic students been involved in deciding the support provision available to them?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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4. Have all dyslexic students been shown basic English skills through the individual support sessions in:

a.) Essay planning?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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b.) Essay construction?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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c.) Essay writing?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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5. Have all dyslexic students been shown time management skills?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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6. Have all dyslexic students been assessed in-house for dyslexia whilst enrolled on access?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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7. Have all dyslexic students been assessed by an Educational Psychologist?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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8. Have all dyslexic students self identified themselves:
a.) Before enrolling on access?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

.....

.....

b.) Whilst enrolled on access?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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9. Have all dyslexic students borrowed computers to support them with their studies?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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10. Have all dyslexic students been provided with note-takers to support them with their studies?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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11. Have all dyslexic students been provided with access course material in alternative formats?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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12. Have all dyslexic students used the skills workshop to prepare their work for submission?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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13. Have all dyslexic students attended an initial interview to discuss their support needs?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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14. Have all dyslexic students taken up the provision of extra time available for examinations?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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15. Have all dyslexic students declared their disability or difficulties when applying to access?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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16. Have all dyslexic students contacted Student Services to arrange support?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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17. Have all dyslexic students taken up the provision of extra subject specific support through access staff?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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18. Have all dyslexic students support packages being arranged through:

a.) Study Support?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

.....

.....

b.) Student Services?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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19. Have the support needs for all dyslexic students been identified at the initial interview?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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20. Have all dyslexic students signed a learning support agreement?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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21. Have all dyslexic students completed a pre-assessment for access such as writing an introductory piece?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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22. Have all dyslexic students taken part in a review of their support package?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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23. Have all dyslexic students taken up the offer of additional teaching from a specialist teacher?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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24. Have all dyslexic students accessed the option to have:

a.) Handouts in alternative formats?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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b.) Teaching materials in alternative formats?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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30. Any further comments

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(Please continue overleaf)

Thank you for your co-operation.

Completed by:..... Contact No:

Appendix 2(l)

Stage 2 of the Research

Learning Support Questionnaire

**DISABLED PEOPLE AND THE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES INTO
HIGHER EDUCATION**

College C

LEARNING SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

To:

I am reviewing the support provision available for dyslexic students enrolled on *access* courses at the colleges of further education that are affiliated to De Montfort University.

Please take five minutes to complete this questionnaire and return to: James M Palfreman-Kay, Department of Social and Community Studies, Faculty of Health & Community Studies, De Montfort University, Scraptoft Campus, Leicester LE7 9SU Tel: (0116) 2577878 E-mail: jmpk@DMU.ac.uk

1. *Have all dyslexic students been assessed in-house?*

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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2. *Have all dyslexic students been assessed by an Educational Psychologist whilst enrolled on access?*

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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3. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of one to one support?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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4. Have all dyslexic students taken up the provision of group support?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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5. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of extra time for examinations?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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6. Have all dyslexic students taken up the provision of Information Technology to support them with their studies e.g. loan of laptop computers?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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7. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of computers to assist them with their examinations?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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8. Have higher educational grants such as the Disabled Students Allowance been accessed for all dyslexic students progressing into higher education?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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9. Have all dyslexic students taken up the individual half an hour support each week?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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10. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of small group support?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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11. Have all dyslexic students used the:

a.) One to one support to talk about any specific problems related to their studies?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

.....

.....

b.) One to one support to talk about a programme of work that will help them to be successful with their studies?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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12. Have all dyslexic students used:

a.) Small group support to talk about any specific problems related to their studies?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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b.) Small group support to talk about a programme of work that will help them to be successful with their studies?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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13. Have all dyslexic students used individual support for:

a.) Proof reading of essays?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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b.) Spelling?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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.....

c.) Structuring of essays?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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14. Have all dyslexic students used group support for:

a.) Proof reading of essays?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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.....

b.) Spelling?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

.....
.....

c.) Structuring of essays?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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.....

15. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of two-hour support?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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16. Have all dyslexic students borrowed the Study Skills book from Key Skills to support them with their studies?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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17. Have all dyslexic students borrowed laptop computers on:

a.) Short-term loan?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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.....

b.) Long-term loan?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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18. Have all dyslexic students who have borrowed laptop computers developed their Information Technology skills?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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19. Have all dyslexic students who borrow laptop computers taken up the availability of Information Technology induction courses?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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20. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of equipment to support them with their studies e.g. Dictaphones

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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21. Have all un-diagnosed dyslexic students referred themselves to Key Skills?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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22. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of Study Skills support?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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23. Have all dyslexic students been discovered through college assessment procedures?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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24. Have all dyslexic students taken up the option of writing an action plan?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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25. Have all dyslexic students been involved in a review of their support package each term?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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26. Have all dyslexic students been involved in determining the support package that is available to them?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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27. Have all dyslexic students provided feedback on the support that they have received?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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28. Any further comments

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(Please continue overleaf)

Thank you for your co-operation.

Completed by:..... Contact No:

Appendix 2(m)

Stage 2 of the Research

Learning Support Questionnaire

**DISABLED PEOPLE AND THE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES INTO
HIGHER EDUCATION**

College D

LEARNING SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

To:

I am reviewing the support provision available for dyslexic students enrolled on *access* courses at the colleges of further education that are affiliated to De Montfort University.

Please take five minutes to complete this questionnaire and return to: James M Palfreman-Kay, Department of Social and Community Studies, Faculty of Health & Community Studies, De Montfort University, Scraptoft Campus, Leicester LE7 9SU Tel: (0116) 2577878 E-mail: jmpk@DMU.ac.uk

1. *Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of a:*

a.) Pre-entry assessment interview?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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.....

b.) Guidance interview?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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2. *Have all dyslexic students been assessed before starting access?*
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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3. *Have any dyslexic students displayed concerns over disclosure of their disability?*
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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4. *Have all dyslexic students had their support packages arranged before they started access?*
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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5. *Have all dyslexic students taken up the provision of study skills courses?*
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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6. Have all dyslexic students sought pastoral support whilst enrolled on access?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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7. Have all dyslexic students taken up the provision of note taker support?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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8. Have all dyslexic students sought help with basic English skills through the one to one support sessions?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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9. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of equipment to support them with their studies e.g. spellcheckers?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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10. Have all dyslexic students taken up the Information Technology provision to assist them with their studies e.g. borrowing computers?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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11. Have all dyslexic students been assessed by an Educational Psychologist whilst enrolled on access?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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.....
.....

12. Have all dyslexic students been assessed in-house whilst enrolled on access?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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13. Have all dyslexic students used the one to one support sessions for:

a.) Planning assignments?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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b.) Editing?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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c.) Proof reading of essays?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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d.) Researching?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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e.) A structured spelling programme?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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f.) A structured grammar programme?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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14. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of extra time for examinations?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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15. Have all dyslexic students taken up the provision of one to one support each week?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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16. Any further comments
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(Please continue overleaf)

Thank you for your co-operation.

Completed by:..... Contact No:

Appendix 2(n)

Stage 2 of the research

Learning Support Questionnaire

**DISABLED PEOPLE AND THE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES INTO
HIGHER EDUCATION**

College E

LEARNING SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

To:

I am reviewing the support provision available for dyslexic students enrolled on *access* courses at the colleges of further education that are affiliated to De Montfort University.

Please take five minutes to complete this questionnaire and return to: James M Palfreman-Kay, Department of Social and Community Studies, Faculty of Health & Community Studies, De Montfort University, Scraptoft Campus, Leicester LE7 9SU Tel: (0116) 2577878 E-mail: jmpk@DMU.ac.uk

1. Have dyslexic students contacted you about the dyslexia support provision that is available at this college?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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2. Have you come into contact with the dyslexic adults before they enrol on access?

(Please delete as appropriate)

YES/NO

(Other Comments)

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3. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of one to one support?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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4. Have all un-diagnosed dyslexic students been refereed to learning support staff?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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5. Has the support provision allowed dyslexic students to keep up to date with their studies?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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6. Have all dyslexic students been able to use the Information Technology support provision to assist them with their studies?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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7. Have all dyslexic students been able to access study skills support?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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8. Have all dyslexic students taken up the availability of extra time for examinations?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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9. Have all dyslexic students sought help in writing up assignments?

(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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10. Have all dyslexic students sought pastoral support from learning support staff?
(Please delete as appropriate)
YES/NO
(Other Comments)

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11. Any further comments

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(Please continue overleaf)

Thank you for your co-operation.

Completed by:..... Contact No::::.....

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